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TWENTY-FIVE CANTOS

FROM THE

DIVINA COMMEDIA

OF

DANTE

CANTOS FROM THE DIVINA COMMEDIA OF DANTE

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH VERSE

BY

C. POTTER

A few Press Opinions on the First Edition

"Lovers of Dante will hail with satisfaction and pleasure the present work. It has everything to commend it to the public favour—the arguments being acceptably abridged, and the translations fresh and vigorous. It will, by virtue of its merit, find extensive circulation."—*Belfast News Letter.*

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DIGBY, LONG & CO., PUBLISHERS, LONDON.

TWENTY-FIVE CANTOS

FROM THE

89651

DIVINA COMMEDIA

OF

DANTE

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH VERSE

BY

C. POTTER

A NEW AND ENLARGED EDITION

LONDON
DIGBY, LONG AND CO., PUBLISHERS
18 BOUVERIE STREET, FLEET STREET, E.C.
1897

E. J. Walter Esq.

*** These Twenty-five Cantos of Dante's Divina Commedia, selected from a Hundred, seem only as a few leaves from a giant tree; written in a mediæval age, and, as he tells us after his vision, at the beginning of the fourteenth century, it still stands as a landmark for all ages.

To those who cannot read him in his sonorous Italian is given, as nearly as is possible, a literal translation in these verses.

C. P.

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INFERNO

CANTO I

THE ARGUMENT

The Poet having unwittingly entered a wood, and having lost the track, is exposed to great peril.

He reaches the open plain and dark valley below, where he meets the Shade of Virgil, who offers to guide him by other ways out of his difficulty.

Dante

INFERNO

Canto I

I WAS a Pilgrim that had turned astray
  Within a trackless wood ;
And in the middle of Life's journeying way
  In shrouded darkness stood.

Why speak I now of that supremest hour,
  Of savage vastness, and of dire dismay,
That with the bitterness of death recalls
  Its ghastly, vanished power :

But to rehearse the good I since have tasted,
  And tell of things committed to my care,
  Since foolishness my soul had once belated ;
That punishment did not prevent my blessing's share.

A few more steps, and fatal as to all,
  The chasm lay beneath me, dark and wide ;
  The place my heart's fear should the most enthral,
Because the Light of Heaven had ceased to be my Guide.

Yet scarcely had I reached the vale below,
  When early morning touched the shouldered hill,
  And in its light the Star of Love aglow,
Shone with her Beacon fire, a Guide and Guardian still.

Then after needful rest with strength supplied,
I slowly, cautiously, my steps retrace;
And looked around me, at the chasm wide,
As rescued mariner the baffled surge might gaze.

When lo! some forest beast[1]; a spotted pard,
With nimble feet entangled where I stept,
Nor forward scarcely let me go one yard;
And more than once my thoughts repent the place I left.

The hour, the season, and the spring's young time,
Were soothing all my troubled heart of care,
For soon the sun would take his glorious climb
Above the stars; and earth as in her prime looked fair.

Nor marvelled I that the gay spotted thing,
Hindering my steps, should cease me to annoy;
But much I marvelled, when with thunderous swing,
And head erect, a lion came in sight which might destroy;

And with him came a wolf, a murderess, she
Insatiable, lean, with ravening jaw;
The dread of many people, now of me,
Who hence no hope to gain the nearer hill-top saw.

As those who covet most, with greed inspired,
Just touch the summit of their earthly gain;
When times have changed, and lost that they acquired,
With bitterness it feeds their empty thoughts and pain.

[1] "Among the beasts of the Deoghur jungles an occasional *chetah* was to be found. In Oudh and other parts of India this animal is domesticated and kept by sporting Rajahs for the purpose of running down antelope; in the Deoghur country they keep themselves by running down the goats and sheep of the people. A curious animal is this hunting chetah, a cat (*i.e.*, a small and much attenuated leopard) down to its feet, and at their extremities a dog."—From *Blackwood's Magazine*, article by Edward Braddon, Nov. 1893.

Urged by the beast relentlessly, my feet
Have reached the open arid desert now;
When with what speed I might, that forced retreat
Sent me beyond, to mute and sunless shades of woe.

There stood before me One methought looked faint,
As with long silence; and in piteous case,
All breathlessly to him I made my plaint,
"Or art thou Man, nor Ghost? help, save me from this place."

"Not man I am, though once in man's estate;
My parents from Mantua, Lombards they;
Born under Julian, when the times were late,
And false gods in; at Rome, in good Augustus' day

"I was a poet, and I sang of one
Who came from Troy, after proud Ilion burned,
The just man he, of Anchises the son;—
But wherefore to this baneful place, thy footsteps turned?

"Why not ascend the Hill of thy delight,
The source and summit of thy every joy?"—
"And art thou Virgil, at whose soaring flight
I gazed?" as with bowed head I stood, shamfaced and coy.

"Fountain of Wisdom! where thy student drew
His inspirations; and the Guide of me;
Who in my style one only master knew;
So that what praise I gained, I gave it back to thee.

"Let the great love I bore thee, now avail
To save me from this savage, and her fright;
Which my whole being threatens to assail,
And from whose close pursuit just now I took my flight."

"Thee it behoves to take some other way
From this bad place, if now thou wouldst be free";
(For he had seen my tears) "that beast will slay
All those she hinders, but to stay their death's decree

" Her guilty nature makes her greedy will
Ravenous in feast, desire yet more of gain ;
And strangely does she mate ;—and strangely, till
The hound come that harries her; that kills her with heart pain.

" This shall not live on land or dross, but be
For Wisdom, and for Virtue, and for Love ;
There in the Lowlands of his Italy,
Festro to Festro ; those that others died for, the salvation prove.

" This will not turn, or stay until he chase
The envious beast, lurking where men may dwell,
Forward, and thence pursuing to the place,
Whence envy drove her forth ; and chase her back to Hell.

" So, for thy betterment, as I discern
If thou wouldst follow wheresoe'er I led,
I would conduct thee to the eternal bourne,
And through the dark of Hell, with thee would closely tread.

" Where thou shouldst hear the ancient spirits cry,
And see them suffer in the second death ;
And after that, the souls of those that lie
Content, if saved by fire, they leave the sulphurous breath.

" And if the blessed Folk thou too wouldst see,
There is a soul, which is more blest than I,
That shall conduct thee to the place, and be
Thy Guide ; when I will leave thee in her company.

" For of that city, Governor he reigns,
Who wills not any should be there through me ;
Lord of all lands ; sole Emperor there remains ;
Blest man ! His Choice for place in that high sovereignty."

" By the great God thou knew'st not, let me reach,
Through realms of woe, the safety I should find
At Peter's gate ;—Poet, I thee beseech " ;
This said, he led the way ; I followed close behind.

INFERNO

CANTO IV

THE ARGUMENT

The Poets descend together into the limbo of the First Circle of the Inferno. Virgil discourses of the inhabitants to Dante, who thereafter recognises the mighty Spirits of Antiquity; and with less fear than he entered it, leaves for the Second Circle.

Dante

INFERNO

Canto IV

AS from beneath, o'er me there broke a sound,
A thund'rous swell of some mysterious power,
Like those I felt, that in deep slumbers bound,
Suddenly start and wake at an unwonted hour.

How, when, and where: till, with my eyes unsealed,
And consciousness returned, I looked, when lo!
A valley of great darkness stood revealed,
The gathered tone I heard, the infinite of woe.

Obscured with clouds and mist, the abyss profound
With straining eyes I strove to pierce; the gloom
Unfathomed could reveal no standing ground,
As to this blinded world descending we must come.

Then the pale poet silence broke, began,
"I know this place, and surely shalt thou know."
And I, with colour like to his and wan,
"How canst thou soothe my doubt with fear upon thy brow?"

Then he to me: "The pity in my face
For all this people's anguish and their doom,
Thou didst mistake for fear of the dark place;—
But let us now descend, unhindered by the gloom."

So on he led me as he had before,
Towards the first circle which the abyss now spann'd,
And soon the sound I heard, I knew no more
As moans, but as the sighs the eternal breezes fanned.

Fixed in unchanging state a mighty throng
Gathered therein ; women, and children, men,
Dismartyred stayed—"Wherefore to these belong,
"Such doul thou hast not asked," said the good Master then.

"These had reward,—in wisdom's ways took heed,
No glaring sins their earthly lives had scarred,
But having lived without the Church's creed,
And unbaptized, as such of Paradise debarr'd.

"For in thy Faith this is the entrance door,
Although the Christian Era not begun,
They worshipped God, in ignorance, long before ;
Of such as these was I, and in their midst am one.

"For that defect, and not for graver sin,
Eternal loss, without transgression sore,
Hopelessly baffling my desires therein ;
Oppressed with grief for valiant souls I knew of yore."

"Tell me, oh tell me, Lord and Master mine,"—
As though I would be certain of the Faith
That vanquished so much error,—"now define,
"Was it their merits, or one's else, prevailed in that thou saith?"

Then he as with my secret thought impressed :
"I had not long been in the place of woe,
Ere I beheld, more potent than the rest,
One with the sign encrowned of victory on his brow.

"And wandering by, the shades that swept the gloom
Of our first parents, with their youngest son ;
Abraham with Isaac and the patriarchs loom ;
Moses lawgiver, and David the King was one.

"Israel with Rachel, that a nation gave
And bless'd to many others of that day,
Though in thy knowledge none besides can save—
But let not such discourse further our steps delay.

"And undeterred by any speech I made,
Descend we now, and through the dark profound
To that abode of spirits in the shade,
As dense and unrevealed as is the misty ground."

So onward still, and through the gloom he led;
Nor had we far advanced, when fiery glow
Conquered that realm of darkness: as it fled
With horror some I saw, inhabitants below.

"Oh thou that gavest to Science and to Art
Due honour, tell me wherefore are these found
In so much anguish that they dwell apart
As disassociates from all else around?"

"The honourable mention that these made,
And fame they gathered, was not of thy life,
Acquirèd grace from heaven on them was laid;"—
Whose voice I too had heard above the earthly strife.

And most of all the Poet's voice, whose shade
So honoured from their midst had disappeared,
My Master;—who resuming converse, said,
His voice subdued and faint—"Mark those we have revered.

"The foremost of them, in his hand his sword,
Homer, with face unmoved, as others three
That follow him, their sire, of verse the Lord;—
Horace, the Satirist; Ovid; and Lucan last we see."

Not by their names I knew them, but their voice
As heard by me, and in their memories blest,
The assembled students of a school so choice,
They made one, for his song, the Lord of all the rest.

Who like an eagle high above them flew;—
Came swiftly t'wards me with saluting sign,
Not for sufficient reason as I knew;—
Whereat I saw my master smile, to honour me incline.

For that he knew it placed me in the set,
An added sixth amongst the assembled wise;
So we passed through the radiance we had met
In silence as beseems it, and that speech supplies.

Till to a noble castle close we drew,
With seven arched portals round its lifted wall;
Protecting it, a lovely streamlet, through
We stept as on dry ground, not hindering us withal.

And in the meadows bordering it between,
People were there, grave, and with dull set eyes,
And great authorities in them were seen;
Seldom they speak,—their words scarce above whispers rise.

Some set apart, within the vaulted side
Of the wide openings, high exposed to view
In the broad light that showed their honour's pride,
Where all below might give their quality its due.

Whilst on the grass enamelled at their feet
The mighty spirits of the past were met;
On the right hand, in this their green retreat,
In my opinion, seemed above the others set.

I saw Electra, with much company,
Of whom had Ettore and Æneas been;
Cæsar, all armed, with his rapacious eye;
Apart, Camilla, and the Amazonian Queen.

I saw the Latin King, and seated near,
Lavinia, his daughter, Brutus with the heel
That chased out Tarquin, and besides these were
Lucretia, Julia, Marzia, and Corneile.

With Saladin, from others that withdrew ;
Whilst, somewhat nearer to the border ground,
The Master Mind that coloured all they knew,
Had his philosophers assembled close around ;

Admiring, honouring him in every look ;
Plato and Socrates in their retreat,
Whom others for their earlier models took ;
But power would fail to tell the numbers at their feet.

And hurried from the place we sought in dread,
Our company reduced from six to two,
Out of the quiet, trembling breezes led,
Another way I passed into the night below.

INFERNO

CANTO V

THE ARGUMENT

In the Second Circle, having passed the Inquisitor Minos, Virgil introduces to Dante the Shades of some Historical characters; and after listening to the story of Francesca and Paolo, overcome by emotion, he falls to the ground in a swoon.

Dante

INFERNO

CANTO V

IN the descent of the next circle now,
Less wide, but with complaint of sharper sting
More loud, stood Minos with his wrinkled brow,
Hideous Inquisitor of deeds an entrance there might bring ;

Examining each, dispatching with his word,
Such as confessed,—confess again, and sin,
To manner bred ; and those that draw the cord
Tighter, that holds them fast, and keeps the Hell within.

Continuing in their usual course below,
An entrance here would scarcely seem more sad,
When they descend to their apportioned woe,
According as the deeds they brought were low and bad.

Then Minos, when he saw me, thus he spake,
"Oh, thou that to this Hospice woe betide
Art come, despite the Inquisition that I make—
Beware the entrance broad; in whom thou dost confide."

Answered my Duke ;—"Wherefore so much complaint?
Do not deter his fated footsteps now ;
By other's will he came, and by constraint ;
A will none can resist, and ask no more, do thou."

Then had mine ear first caught the dolorous sound,
As conscious of the place whereto we came;
So full of plaint and murmuring all around,
The seat of darkest night, enduring still the same.

Mid groanings like to a tempestuous sea,
Always combating with contrary winds,
The infernal storm that soothed can never be,
In irksome repetition that the spirit binds.

Which had arrived beforehand to that end,
Wherein are now laments and loud complaint,
Virtue Divine blaspheming, they descend,
Foreknowing all the doom that waits their sinful taint,

And mingled with it a tormenting fact,
The condemnation of the carnal will,
When strong desire had conquered reason's tact,
Hither and thither borne without the guiding skill.

When in the colder time they leave the shore,
On battered wings that the wild storms detain,
Having no hope of rest for evermore
With the vast throng in space, else had they less of pain;

And as in flock the cranes are seen to fly
Athwart the skies in a long darkened line,
With like complaining notes and mournful cry,
Some shadowy trailing forms nearest I could define,

Beating the heavy air: "Say who are those?"
"A Queen, the first, of colour, wouldst thou know,
Much favoured as her license should disclose,
Who framed the laws to fit the less her crimes might show.

"This is Semiramis; by state decrees
Succeeding Nino, who to her was wed,
Ruling the lands held of the Soudanese;
The other one, Love's maniac, to costliest tomb had fled.

"There, Cleopatra, most luxurious Queen;
Helen of Troy, who much of trouble brought
To many Peoples; and Achilles seen,
The mighty warrior, that for love his battles fought.

"Paris, and Tristram, Britain's errant knight,
Thousands and thousands, shadowy forms are there,
Whom love had shattered, and withdrawn from sight;
Names of such ancient knights and dames for pity I forbear."

Then I commenced: "Poet, wilt thou allow
Speech of those two we see that, keeping close,
Cumber the air, they seem to move so slow?"
"When these are near, they will unfold to thee their woes.

"How love had brought them hither." Nearer now,
Fast as they might on the delaying air:
"Oh, anxious heart!" to me they whispered low,
"Come near to us and speak, if others will forbear.

"For like two doves, responsive to a voice,
On outstretched wings shut out from a sweet nest,
To join the motley throng of Dido's choice,
In the malignant air we stay at love's behest.

"Oh, human heart! that, gracious and benign,
Hast come to visit us in the dull sky,
Which had relation to that world of thine:
If with the Universe's king happily thy friendships lie.—

"For thy own peace pray that he would remit
The penalty to natures so perverse;
And if speech with us be not deemed unfit,
Whilst treacherous winds keep still, our tale we will rehearse.

"By the sea coast, where Po's descending wave
Laves with the sea in peace, our birth was there;
Love that makes heart to heart like waters lave,
Brought mine to hers—parted, had sore offence to bear.

"Love, that another's loving ne'er forgives,
Held me fast bound in his unyielding net;
Nor has forsaken with our ended lives,
Love that had brought us both to death—and Cain has met."

This was a hard word of them now I heard,
And when I understood the soul's offence
My countenance had changed, it was observed,
So that the Poet said to me, "What thinkest thou from thence?'

And in response I said, "Alas, alas!
That such sweet thoughts and so much fond regard
Should but have led them to such dreary pass;"
And where those two kept close, I turned Francesca toward:

"Francesca, hearing this of thy sad fate
Has filled my heart with pity most, and grief,
But say, when gentlest sighs were breathed of late,
Was there no doubting mingled with thy fond belief?"

Then she to me: "There is no anguish dealt
To misery that gives a sharper blow
Than memory of departed joys once felt,
As thou in thy affections, too, must surely know.

"And if thou hast an earnest wish to scan
All the deep rooting of our earliest love,
And if to know thou canst how it began,
Not from its bitter end that tale wouldst thou remove.

"Of Lancelot, whom love had strictly bound,
A tale one day to our delight we read,
Believing nought amiss might there be found,
Suspecting more, had made our heightened colour spread,

"And reading on, all in a moment came
The strong desire to taste what bliss was there,
When lips pressed lips, and trembling mine the same;—
Thus soul once knit to soul we stay in the delaying air."

Galeotto was the book of evil plan,
As he who wrote it will have cause to know:
Francesca thus approved as Paul began;
Oblivion took my pity, faint at their tale of woe.

PURGATORIO

Canto I

THE ARGUMENT

Dante, entering into Purgatory, recognises the Shade of Cato, whom he addresses in a long and flattering speech. Whereupon Cato, guiding to the seashore, proposes to Dante similar acts to those he first suggested to Cato.

Dante

PURGATORIO

CANTO I

IN smoother waters now, with sails unfurled,
Bark of my Genius, wing thy onward way,
And leave the cruel sea for that new world
Where souls are purged from sin, till mete for heaven are they.

Oh ! Holy Muse, do thou my verse inspire,
Lifting from death to life the poet's lay ;
And Calliope, somewhat touch the lyre
For those who with the wayward nine, hopeless, unpardoned,
stay.

Fair streamed the colour of the saffron skies ;
With fresh'ning airs from early morning now
That bathed, somewhat bedimmed, my aching eyes,
Whilst Orient, smiling, saw the Star of Love aglow.

Then turned I to the Four Cross Stars that gleamed
Above the Nations of an earlier line ;
Oh ! happy they on whom such brilliance streamed
Whilst all the heaven rejoiced that saw the glorious sign.

So soon as these regards had filled my soul,
Slowly my gaze along the horizon went,
And turned towards that other northern pole,
Could see the glimmering light its constellation lent.

When in the dawn, and standing near was one,
An ancient man, with reverence in his face,
Such as no father ever gave to son ;
Like to the holy stars I saw, in radiant grace.

O'er his pale chest there streamed his silvery beard,
And touched his glistening locks, that with it blent
From his pale forehead, and his look revered,
Down to his girdle's hem in mingled whiteness went.

"Who may you be, that gainst the stream of Hell
Have dared to pass beyond the eternal bound ;
And who has guided you I bid you tell,
Or given you light to leave the dark infernal ground ?"

Shaking his honest beard ; —"Do the laws change,
Or has prevailed in Heaven some council new ?
That the damned come, my grotto to estrange ;
Who held it from my Lord, from him my title drew."

Soon as my Duke had made to me the sign,
Reverend in gesture, humble in my speech,
Pardon I craved :—"Not for this deed as mine,
But for a Lady who from Heaven could so beseech

"My Guide ; and if allowed he can explain
The situation, whilst I vouch its truth :
Not that my fault, which gives thee so much pain,
For simply by his folly I was led forsooth.

"Only last evening was it that we met,
When hastily I bound myself to go
Where he might lead, who would no hindrance let
Till he had brought me hitherward, as thus you know.

"But first he led where wicked souls reside ;
And then proposed that I should see the rest,
That purified within thy realm abide,
Till in their high attainment I might see them blest.

"Grant us thy leave to pass and seek that place,
Which, as the Refuge of my life is dear;
Albeit, thou mayst recall another case
In Utia;—the bitterness of death thou didst not fear

"When title and magnificence were spoiled.—
Eternal Edicts do not fetter those
That live, and under Midas never toiled,
Who envious of thy Rights, hath heapt on thee such woes.

"By the pale grandeur of thy vestment now,
Oh holy heart! By all once held so dear,
For the great love's remembrance sake allow;
And in the Higher Courts thy Cause shall be made clear.

"And Marcia that I saw, be blest when thou
Hast shown the path which leads me to my peace
In new dominion;—not my words allow,
But say a Lady out of Heaven brought my release.

"Where never more the poisonous stream can flow,
To fret me as I breathed it, in that hour
When shut within its bounds I shrank to know
The inevitable law, a fact, and felt its power.

"Go now and change thy garb for simple cloak
Of matted rush; and with washed face, retain
No mark that might betray thy personal look
Or give a lingering hint of suicidal stain:

"Lest at our company in some surprise,
The Officers on Dignity that wait
In Paradise might cast suspicious eyes;
And cautiously refuse admission at the gate.

"There is an Island near, along whose shore,
In ooze and sand, the lonely rushes spread;
Beneath the waves that beat for evermore;
The only plant that thrives, that looks not sere and dead.

"Let us depart; for the now risen sun,
Mounting aloft, shall light us on our way;
And ere his downward course be yet begun,
Will aid thy safe return before the set of day."

Ended my foolish speech erewhile, but he
Silently raised me; not till with lifted eyes
I might recall my Chief, he answered me;
"Follow my footsteps, son, far as my pathway lies.

"Soon as the level plain that slanting low,
Ends in a deep descent, I must away;
Morn brings the hour of prayer, none may forego;
And near the trembling sea I must not long delay.

"There is a secret path from here, which turns
Towards that spot of marsh and reedy ground;
Which none could ever quit unless he learns;
But in my guidance there the entrance may be found.

"There where my swarthy race 'mid sun and dew
Which smite and harm them, in communion still
Worship as was their wont and as they knew;
Thy Master's soft hands wash in the dark morass rill.

"Bring him the mournful rushes that had part,
Colouring the native tissues of my skin;
That he may learn to be expert in art,
Nor gain that shore belate, to stay unlaunched within.

"And in return, if such should be your want,
Make me a girdle; fitting gift from you.
Marvellous! that such a kindred humble plant
Renewed, should walk the waves, where late beneath it grew."

PURGATORIO

CANTO II

THE ARGUMENT

Dante and Virgil, with their Guide, standing on the shore, witness the arrival of a group of Spirits, one of whom is recognised by Dante as his friend Casella, a Poet.

Cato receives and conducts the group towards the mountain, and leaves Dante and Virgil by themselves with apparent unconcern.

Dante

PURGATORIO

Canto II

TO paler hues had changed the vermeiled sky ;
As forth the Sun from his horizon crept,
Near to the shades of night, nor mounting high ;—
Pillowed on faded Rose, the belle Aurora slept.

Following its course now on the shore we stood,
The boundary of a wide and unknown sea ;
Like those, who, powerless to attempt the flood,
Retain their heart's desire, though vain the shore to flee.

When lo ! as dawn had changed to early day,
Amid the vaporous, red, and murky air,
That further than the coast-line dared not stray,
Borne on the waves, a light appeared, which seemed approaching there,

Sailless and swift ; whereat in some surprise,
Turning towards my Chief for that he knew,
I saw a radiance in his widening eyes,
Gazing intently as it nearer came in view.

Soon I could faintly trace the form of one,
Seen only by its whiteness, and behind
Another, sheltered by his wings that shone,
Borne onwards towards us with the swiftness of the wind.

Whereat my Master spake aloud no word
Till he had seen the whiteness of their wings,
When at the bark afloat his soul was stirred:
"Beware, beware! your bark but to the jungle brings."

"The Angel of the Lord! Oh, raise your hand
In token that our service is divine;
No human anger warns them from this land,
Nor will of ours to come from far and make this sign.

"Say that to them no right divine was given
As messengers to treat of mundane things;
Nor with decrees of the unchanging heaven
Hither to cleave the air on their immortal wings."

Yet nearer still and nearer towards the shore
Approached the Light Divine, that pierced the mist,
Whereat our dazzled eyes could look no more
Till it arrived; a slight, swift thing that could the waves resist.

And at the helm the heavenly pilot steered
With his credentials written in his face;
A hundred souls, or more, with him had neared
The shore, and with one voice they raised the psalm of praise.

"In Exitu Israel de Egypto";
Then with the holy cross they made the sign,
And leapt ashore as in delight to go:
With joyous steps and swift the troop towards us incline.

And fronting us began enquiring speech,
Gazing upon the shore in much surprise;
"Tell us," they said, "the best way we can reach
The higher ground, beyond, that seems from hence to rise."

For now the sun advanced with brightening ray,
And in his arrowy flight the stars subdued,
Nor in the Pleiades' light content to stay
Had chased the lingering Goat that in mid-heaven had stood.

Then Virgil answered: "You perchance may deem
That we are well acquainted with this spot;
Though strangers only like yourselves that seem;
By road we came, so rough, return, a trifling thing is not."

These souls aware that by my shortened breath
I was a mortal, pale with wonder grew,
And message sent with olive branch at length,
That we might speak, if so inclined, and tell them what we knew.

And as they saw me affable in look,
Appeared to think themselves in fortune's way;
And quite oblivious that the path they took
On betterment intent, might meet with some delay.

When one I noticed from amongst the rest
To eagerly press forward and embrace;
That much it moved me to return his zest,—
When in that fleeting shade I recognised his face.

Thrice did my arms essay to meet his own,
And thrice anon they fell against my breast;—
Whereat he smiled, and backward stept alone,
Whilst marvelling, as I thought, and with my face impressed.

Then I advancing followed close the shade,
Which tenderly entreated to desist,
But in a tone I recognised, and prayed
That it would stop and speak and not be so dismissed.

"Because I loved thee in my mortal frame
Think not that now thou art to me less dear;
Then why detain me, if our path the same?"—
"Cassella mine! It was a different way I entered here.

"But thou, how much hast thou been robbed of time?"—
"No robbery that, I was well pleased to rise
And take my passage to another clime,
With those who stand and wait decree of the All-Wise.

"Three months I watched by Tiber's stream that laves
With the salt sea, waiting the bark's release,
In pleasure found floating upon the waves,
Whether the wing was turned; and in departure peace."

Then I to him: "If this alliance new
Has not effaced thy memory of Love Song
That ofttimes soothed me in the hours we knew,
Sing to us, weary now with travel rough and long."

"Love be by song for ever": then he sang,
In tones so soft and sweet, beyond me sent,
I and my Master, and the troop began
To feel united in a bond of great content.

As fixed we stood attentive to the strain,
Following his notes wafted upon the air,
Then suddenly another sound again
Attracts us, in the cry of our true watchman there.

"Why linger thus? why should you be so slow;—
Detained ascending towards the rock-crowned height
Of wider vision, where you soon should know
The power of God revealed, that waits to meet your sight?"

Like as a flock of pigeons on the ground
Alighting, in a fresh green pasture fed,
Suddenly start at some unwonted sound,
They leave their dainty meal, and in a cloud have fled.

Away, away! from all allurements here,
Which might from the great cure their souls detain,—
Startled by that assault of lingering, there
They leave their song in haste; nor did we long remain.

PURGATORIO

CANTO III

THE ARGUMENT

Arrived at the foot of the mountain, they are discouraged by the difficult ascent till instructed by a troop of spirits, amongst whom is Manfred, King of Naples, mortally wounded in battle with Charles, in a Florentine war, and excommunicated for his religious opinions at the instigation of Pope Clement; afterwards ignominiously buried without the walls of the kingdom.

Dante

PURGATORIO

Canto III

THAT flock of spirits from our sight withdrawn,
Virgil and I the lonely pathway went;
He, with his stride, left me behind forlorn,
In his hot haste to gain the Mount Beneficent.

Bereft of him, my Guide, and where was I?—
One moment's recollection changed his pace;
As only on his care I might rely,—
In soft contrition sought his error to efface.

The sunbeams now had pierced the mid-day sky,
Which thrust my shadow darkly on the ground;
And as I turned towards Virgil I descry
That sunbeam cleft, his form is shadowless around.

Then straightway fear, that lacked an arm of flesh,
Oppressed my doubting soul; but he replied,
With strengthening words my courage to refresh,
"Why shouldst thou him distrust who was, and is thy Guide?

"'Tis evening where my buried body lies
That once had cast a shadow, there enshrined
At Naples; marvel not that from these skies
No scorching sunbeams now impediment can find.

"Suffering the torments still of heat and cold,
With those to virtue who were well inclined;
And with like bodies as the men of old,
Not willingly who left their wishes far behind.

"The Mystery of the matter to indite
Seek not, ye blest! nor why in shades forlorn
So many: Plato and the Stagirite—
But then what need for Mary's Son to have been born?"

Deep thought had bowed his head, and silent mood
Broke off his speech; stedfast my face I set
To gain the mountain that before us stood,
But with ascent so steep, we might not move one step.

"And who knows now which way the pathway lies,"
Then spake my Guide, "for those who have no wings?"
Upon the summit still I fixed my eyes,
Whilst he explores the ground, that no solution brings.

Then as upon the topmost rock I gaze,
A cloud of spirits on the left I saw,
That nearer, and yet nearer, in a maze,
Which scarcely seen to move, towards us seemed to draw.

"Look up," I said, "these may incline to teach
The way; and where thy guidance fails, enlight."
Then he regarding me with liberal speech,—
"Fear not, my Son beloved, but I will guide thee right.

"Let us advance towards those that move so slow;
And thou, thy courage keep the steep to gain"—
When as we neared the thousand steps or so,
Within arm's length, awhile, the troop with us remain.

"Spirits Elect! Foretasters of the peace
Which I believe you hence expect to know:
Instruct us to ascend; and so increase
Your bliss, by aiding those who else remain below."

Like as a flock of sheep, they know not why,
Follow the leader, and by threes or four
Skip; and with downcast eyes then scent, or lie,
As does the first that troop their favoured leader saw.

Not at the voice of Virgil, shadowless,
They half retreat, but started at the shade
I cast upon the ground; "Truly I will confess
"Without your question," he his ready answer madé.—

"This is a mortal: marvel not that this
Should break the sunbeams' force to pierce his side:
And surely virtue's aim, in search of bliss,
Should gain reward, and find in you a certain guide."

To this appeal, responsive came a voice,—
"Go, where the steep declines the other side";
Mid wave of hands that emphasised his choice,
The Leader of that meek and graceful flock replied.

Then turned to me: "Say if thou canst recall
My visage, and that we before have met?"—
Modest his mien, and beautiful, withal
A sabre's thrust its scar on his cleft eyebrow set.

I with his noble bearing much impressed,
Humbly disclaimed such knowledge, then he smiled,
And showed another wound high on his chest,
"Grandson to Queen Constanza; Manfredi, I am styled.

"And whosoe'er thou art, to earth returned,
Seek my fair daughter, born to Arragon,
And Sicily; of me if lies were learned,
Say thou hast seen me, and the truth, that grace is won.

"Perchance those two may find the arm that thrust
Two mortal wounds, and my forgiveness own,
Whose sins were scarlet; but I fled in trust
To the wide arms for those who have repentance known.

"From this had Shepherd Clement taken text,
My bones had still near Benevento lain,
Nor moved to foreign ground, where the winds vex't
Moan, and unsheltered round them falls the drenching rain.

"An Excommunicant, in silent ways
Ignobly buried; yet no curses dark
Keep back the Love Divine, where hope still stays,
And verdure blossoms into life within the bark.

"'Tis true that those who in contempt may stray
From Holy Church, a penalty endure;
But Heaven itself is moved by those who pray,
And souls through prayer obtain an earlier cure."

PURGATORIO

CANTO XXVII

THE ARGUMENT.

Dante is impeded in his course by the intense brilliance of the Sun, which he hesitates to enter; but is persuaded to pass through. After sleeping in the shadow of a great rock, he has a dream; awakening to see a level country before them, when Virgil takes a final leave of him.

Dante

PURGATORIO

Canto XXVII

AS at the first, the Sun's vibrating force
Spread in his Maker's sky the ensanguined red,
And drooped o'er Spain, where Libra marks his course,—
Then from the Ganges' waves refreshed in newness sped.

Forth from the flame God s angel on the brink,
Stood in great joy and sang—"The pure in heart."
With voice above our life—"Ye saintly, think
Not through this fire ye enter in, till life depart."

Whilst to that song, not deaf my inward ear,
I thought of him who in the grave had lain,
As we pressed on. To me "Come not thou near":
Therewith a lifted arm he barred, "Nor entrance gain."

Then Virgil turned to me, the good escort:
"Thou that not tasting death did torment know:
Remember! And from Gerion safely brought,
Nearer to God thou art, and what can harm thee now?

"Know that if through this fire thou shouldst be led
Into the midst thereof, a thousand years
Would never singe the hairs upon thy head,—
Or doubt, hold front thy garment's hem, see if that sears;

"Then enter undismayed, unharmed pass through."
I against conscience and my contract stood:—
Which troubled him, and courage to renew,
"This is the wall that from Beatrice part thee could."

As at the name of Thisbe opened wide
The lids of Pyramus, that death had bound,—
Whilst gazing changed to berry vermeil dyed:—
In my hard fate I turned at that remembered sound.

Shaking his head: "How long will this require?"
And then he smiled as if a child had tried
To lead as with an apple—front the fire
He placed me: Statius following us, who went as guide.

And when within, I would, had molten glass
Streamed to refresh me, so intense the glow;—
Spake the kind father, soothing whilst we pass,
"Soon shall thy eyes behold thy loved Beatrice now."

There guided us a voice of song without,
Whilst we attentive, following close the sound,—
Came forth of it, a higher step to mount,
And from amidst the light, the voice that led us found.

"Ye blessèd of My Father, come!" the song;
Whilst too intense the glow to choose our way;—
Then evening fell; not changing for less strong,
Though veiled in ardour, beams, that westward turned the day.

With a huge rock projecting on one side,
I took my path, that shaded thus the sun,
And made with lessening force, in darkness hide
The ascending steps, before to mount we had begun.

Then by a gleam of light the glory left,
Ere darkness fell on all the horizon dark,
Each of us made a pillow in the cleft
Which had denied ascent, though in desire we passed.

And not unlike the goats that skip and bound
Upon a topmost crag, their meal supplied,
Silently ruminate, and closing round,
Hide from the sun, whereon for pasturage they relied.

Meanwhile their Pastor on the hillside, all
Regardful watches, for their safety stays,
A guardian, lest mischance one might befall;—
Resting in that peculiar place for their delays.

Thus did our company allotments each
Find in the grotto, sheltered from the day,
And for a little while ere sleep might reach
I watched the stars, grown large and of intenser ray.

And whilst I pondered on the new surprise,
Sleep overcame me—sleep that ofttimes gives
An olden fact seen in a newer guise;
The hour, I think, when Venus with her ardent ray revives.

A lady, young and beautiful in dream,
Bending amidst a flowery mead I saw,—
Singing, she asked my name, as by the stream
She culled the flowers, therein reflected from the shore.

"Leah, I am called," she said; "it pleaseth me
With my white hands to make a garland fair;
But Rachel with her beauteous eyes can see
Mirrored, and all day long, the flowers that deck her hair.

"In her enjoyment all my pleasures take:
She for adornment, and for work am I."—
Now had the lovely dawn begun to break,
Which to the pilgrim tells that glorious day is nigh.

The darkness fleeing all around, and sleep
Departing with it, I, too, then arose:
Said the great master, "Soon the fruit thou'lt reap
Hid in the boughs, a peace the mortals crave to ease their woes."

Thus Virgil spake, and never New Year's gift
In promise charmed me like the words he spaké,—
As onward still upon the rock-bound clift
To mount, did my desires their apter pinions make.

Then where the Mount was gained by steppings higher,
The eyes of Virgil turned and fixed on me :—
"The temporal seen, and the eternal fire,
Further no more, my son, I can discern for thee.

"Thy pleasure now must take thy Teacher's part,
As I have led thee hither in my skill,—
Beyond this steep, no further goes my art,
Whereon thou didst rely, and knew no other's will.

"Behold the Sun in front that shows thee light ;
Behold the herb, the flowers in wooded dells,
Born solely of the earth ; till meets thy sight
Those watchful, beauteous eyes wherein delight then dwells.

"Eyes, full of tears, that brought me to thy side ;—
Stay if thou wilt, or travel, at thy choice ;
No longer with thee now can I abide,
No more direct thy way, by sign or guarding voice.

"Free as by right, thy own decision make ;
In wisdom now no failure can be thine ;
Henceforth I leave thee, thy own path to take ;
Crowned, and with sceptre from me, make thee sole consign."

PURGATORIO

Canto XXVIII

THE ARGUMENT

Dante, left with Statius, arrives at the entrance of the Earthly Paradise, where he meets with an Angelic being (the Lady Matilda), who discourses with him on higher enjoyments, and hints at his future, as the Poet of Paradise.

U of M

Dante

PURGATORIO

Canto XXVIII

AND now I go to look around, and stray
Within the sacred forest's olive green ;
My sight, attempered to the newer day,—
In leisure wandering through the paths between.

Where came no haunting fear of leave-take soon ;
Contentedly I breathed the odorous air
Of a sweet morn that knows not eve or noon,
And felt its softest touch breathed on my forehead there.

Whilst waving branches beckoned me to stay
Where first the holy mountain's shadow fell ;
And midst the foliage, birds attuned their lay ;
No doubt but they were wise, and would direct me well.

As full of joy in early morning's hour
They sang their entertainment in the shade,
That was exchanged from the sirocco's power,
In pine woods of Chiassi, whence their flight was made.

Whilst I, so late arrived from the delay
Of ancient shores into a kingdom new,
Had scarcely power as yet to know my way
Within the sacred grove, and find a pathway through.

Lo! on my left, a streamlet hid near by,
In rippling wavelets ran beneath the grass,
Within the shade made browniest tint thereby,
Where never sunlight fell, or glimpse of moon might pass.

Yet of all waters I could taste before,
In unmixed sweetness this had pleased me best,
The while I took my way along its shore,
Admiring novelties that much my soul imprest.

And as I wondered at the marvellous store
Of fresh varieties around me strewed,
Beheld a sight that made me marvel more,
And in its loveliness all other thoughts subdued.

Beneath the branches in the shady bowers
A lady all alone there roamed about,
Singing whilst she selected flower from flowers,
That with their varied hues tinted her path throughout.

"Oh! beauteous Lady, that from Sun's love beams
Hast drawn thy brightness, if I may divine
That outer looks speak as the heart beseems,—
Wilt thou come nearer, so I list that song of thine.

"Thou dost remind me of a tale of yore,
When Proserpina, gathering flowerets fair
In the lone fields at Springtime, lost her store
Of May blooms, and her anxious mother's watchful care."

Then as the Lady towards the brooklet came
That still divided us, hastening to meet,
In a light dance, careful she threw the same,
Rosied, or lily-belled, and cast them at my feet.

The while unchanged her pure and honest eyes,
In answer to my prayer she makes consent,—
And now her voice across the stream supplies
The meaning to her words, which had but music lent.

Nearer approached the grassy streamlet's bed,
Thither she sent her eyes across to mine;
And ne'er such light 'neath Venus' eyebrow sped
From bow she gave her son, making it his ensign.

Smiling she came along the farthest side,
Still plucked the flowers, holding these in her hand,—
Flowers that the earth had ne'er on seed relied,—
Three paces off as yet, beyond the stream to stand.

Not Hellespont which Xerxes crossed, I ween
To curb all human pride in other men,
Or sea, Leander hating, swam between
From Sestos to Abydos, gave me more chagrin.

"Strangers and unaccustomed to this place,
My smiling countenance might ill beseem
Propriety, the while you fail to trace
My motive, as I answer you across the stream.

"But that sweet Psalm, 'The Lord hath made me glad,'
Will best interpret of my joyful mien;
And thou that foremost stood, and prayed me had
Nearer to come and sing to thee, less space between,

"If thou hast aught to question of these grounds,
I could inform thee as I best may know."
And in reply:—"I find these forest sounds,
Heard from within their shade, and watery stream below,

"Surpass my former knowledge and report."
And she: "I can explain from whence proceeds
Thy admiration of the place thus sought,
And clear thy comprehension of the clouds it breeds.

"The Highest Good, who for his pleasure made
Man good and blest, had given him here to stay
In earnest of the bliss that cannot fade,—
But by his own default was hurried soon away.

"For a defective love, and fruited tree,
Changed honest gaiety and soul's delight;—
And thus the troubled water that we see
Rising from hence, exhaled from damp and earthly blight,

"Which never cures in man the vain desire
It henceforth leaves, partaken of in draught;
The while that mount t'wards heaven we see aspire
Is freed from all the raging thirst this leaves thereaft;

"For there, an atmosphere untaint is found,
In primal force circling around the height,
Where nothing thwarts, or hinders from the ground
The living air that mounting, mounts, in highest flight,

"But makes beneath the umbrageous woods resound;
And gives the tender plant unerring blow,
That in its kiss had nestling virtue found,
And in the blizzard of the north lies waste and withered now.

"Whilst other climes, as so vouchsafed of heaven,
Bring forth a virtuous stock from diverse seed,—
Deem it no less a marvel if is given
Unseeded plants to live and thrive, as so decreed.

["For thou should'st know that this is holy ground,
Filled with all flowers that not from seed had grown,
Bearing the fruits that everywhere abound,
And gathered in the ripening of this clime alone.

"This water that we see owes not its birth
To vaporous air, congealed and held impure,
Falling in showers, again to leave the earth,
But springs from out a fountain scaled and sure;

"And of the will of God largely partakes,
As forth it issues in two channels bound;
This one, towards virtue a new pathway makes,
Where memory of the past of sin no more is found.

"The other all the good to memory brings;—
And one is Lethe, and the other's name
Eunoe; but no taste is in its springs
Of sweetness, unless Lethe bears away the blame;

"Then in its relish does all taste excel.—
Whereas I now have satisfied thy quest
For further knowledge, I may end this well,
With a Heart Token of my own joined to the rest.

"Nor deem it less a prize if, wandering by,
A hinted promise into light I bring;
The Poets that a golden age could spy,
Perchance, in dreams, Parnassian, of this land might sing.

"Which innocent of human root now grows
In a perpetual spring the ripened fruit;
Where nectar from one only fountain flows,
Whereof the praises sung can never more be mute."

As from the Poets then aside she turned,
I saw a recognition and a smile
At what from her conclusion they had learned;—
And toward the lovely lady set my face meanwhile.

PURGATORIO

CANTO XXIX

THE ARGUMENT

Dante having followed the lady by the windings of the stream, sees in the forest a brilliant light, whence there issues a procession of attendants on the Car of Beatrice, drawn by the winged Griffin, which directs its course toward Dante.

Dante

PURGATORIO

Canto XXIX

AND as a lady to her lover sings,
She sent the notes in ending of her lay—
"Blessed are those whose sin a covering brings";—
As by the forest stream she took her onward way

Like to the nymphs given in sole decrees
The shades to deepen, or the sun set free,
Between the branches of o'erhanging trees
With a light step she passed; I following close might see.

And as my feet in unison with hers
Trod the green margin of the parting stream,
With steps agreeing as each step recurs,
Together, for a hundred paces it would seem;

Where the impeded water rose in height,
And stopped me in its onward course of flow,
The pathway underneath it lost to sight,
My lady turned towards me there, and spake she now;

"My Brother, mark thou this, and listen well."—
Lo! all the forest broke in light untold,
So that I marvelled if the lightning fell,
But lightning breaks to pause, and this seemed floods of gold.

That in my thought I said, "What thing is this?"
Whilst a melodious sound along the air,
Reminded me of Eve's default in bliss,
As between Earth and Heaven she might have wandered there.

Sole woman, and so formed to be the head,
Yet not allowing of another's will,
From these delights ineffable had fled,—
Else hers, first felt, had ours continued still.

And as there came to me the primal taste
Of overhanging and eternal peace,
That then had somewhat of my mirth displaced,
In the mid air, between the boughs, I saw the light increase.

And intermingled with it came sweet song.
O consecrated, holy virgins, ye
In cold and watch with whom I suffered long,
For that remembrance in my need, now succour me.

Or haply, Helicon might wander o'er,
And bathe me in the fulness of his stream,
Or might Uranus with his teaching lore
Strengthen my thoughts, to give in verse my theme.

Onward a space were Seven trees of gold,
As in the distance seen, and so removed
That such resemblance only might be told,
Till near approach had all their real nature proved.

Though common objects are by sense deceived,—
These in their distance did not lose their height,
By virtue of a faculty received,
As golden candelabra, were revealed to sight.

Whilst in the voice of song, Hosannas sound,
The beauteous garniture of golden light
Shone with a purer brilliance than had crowned
The moon, serene in the mid heaven, at dark of night.

I, in my wonder, turned me to my Guide ;
With like surprise depicted in his face
He bade me look where might be seen beside
A Bridal train, or like, advancing with slow pace.

The lady chiding me : " Why dost thou gaze
With so much ardour on the living light ?
Nor that which thence proceeds thy wonder raise ? "
As forth they came like chiefs of men all clothed in white.

And of such whiteness none might ever say.—
Restored, the pathway on the left hand side,
The shining water in its devious way,
As old adventure, gave a better light to guide.

I saw the flaming points of glistening gold,
That left their light in the surrounding air,
Tinting it with the colour sevenfold,
That lends the Sun his bow, the Moon her crown to wear.

Leaving the light behind, yet still in view,
Seemed wisest course, and urged ten steps return ;—
The four and twenty Seniors, two and two
Advancing, crowned with Fleur du Luce, I could discern.

Beneath a sky so beautiful the train,
Singing as with one voice, " Blessed art thou
Of Adam's daughters, and shalt blest remain
In this thy loveliness, for evermore as now."

Since that the turf and flowery path were free,
And I had parted on the farthest shore
From Company Elect, I now might see,
Proceeding amidst Light of Lights, Four others more.

Each with a chaplet of green leaves was crowned,
Each had six wings, and every feather eyed
As Argus had, in fabled days renowned :—
These living eyes, and not to ignorance allied.

But rhyme or lecture fails me to transcribe
In words diffuse their forms, or I might tire;
Read how Ezekiel writing could describe
How from the North there came a whirlwind, cloud, and fire

In vision as was seen, and as was writ,
Such like were these, save numbering of their wings;
And there I hold with John, as seems most fit,
For that his number six, similitude best brings.

The space behind these four a Car contained
Revolving on two wheels, triumphant borne
By a leashed Griffin that was there detained,
And fastened lightly at his shoulder, so was drawn.

As tendon on the one and other wing,
An intermediary had joined the three,
That nothing unforeseen might evil bring;
Guiding it with a skill I ne'er before should see:

On wing of feathery gold the air to fly,—
And others two of white, or misty red;
There ne'er was Roman Car upheld so high
With Africanus jubilant; or that Augustus led.

Not to the Sun was given a power like this,
When at the prayer of suppliants below,
Jove wrecked the Car of Phaeton, in his bliss
Wheeling to Earth; consumed in conflagration's glow.

Four ladies there that dexterous guide the wheels,
With dancing step advanced; one like a rose
Such as at night the light of fire reveals,
And one transparent tint of emeralds might disclose.

Another likened to soft fallen snow,
Now and again changing to roseate tint,
And to the song of this, or fast or slow,
The others moved in rhyme, mingling together went.

On the left hand and joining in the dance
Came Four in purple clothed, within their quest;
And one behind the others that advance,
Was treble eyed, with sight revealed above the rest.

And near approaching to the throng of those,
Two elder men, in different habit dressed,
But honest purpose made companions close:
One, with some knowledge, Hippocratian, seemed possessed,—

That human nature was of costliest store;—
The other with a cure had stayed his mind,
And by the sharp and glittering blade he bore,
Filled me with sore affright, across the brook assigned.

Four, whom their humble garb did best befit,
And one behind, an aged man alone,
Seeming as if in sleep, but keen of wit;
Like the first set, these seven, were by their vestments known.

Not these had lily garlands on their brow;
Rather, with rose, or ruddiest flowers were crowned;
One might have sworn, in distance as they show,
That they were all with fire, above the eyebrows bound.

Soon as the Car approaching near me came,
A thunderous sound was heard, these worthy men
That with their talk had somewhat blocked the way,
At the first signal ended their discourses, there and then.

PURGATORIO

Canto XXX

THE ARGUMENT

Beatrice descends in a Car, drawn by the Griffin of a double nature, and rebukes Dante.

Dante

PURGATORIO

Canto XXX

FORTH from the central Light that stars surround,
Which knows not rise or set, or birth or end,
Nor veil of mist that skirts the faulty ground,
An unseen Power to guide, and wandering footsteps bend;

Forth, through the seven starr'd gate which marks the bound,
The car approached, leaving a light behind;
Flying as towards its peace, and with a sound
From the mid heaven as voice borne on the winged wind.

"Veni de Libano, Sponsa mia!
"Veni de Libano! Veni"; led
That higher angel of a hundred choir,
With voice that wakes to winged life the caverned dead:

"Blessed is He that cometh," floats along
Responsive, as the angelic train anew
Take up the message of that peace in song;
Whilst with full hands, each way, fresh lilies round they strew.

Oft have I seen at dawn the eastern skies
Rose-tinted, opposite where lay the calm;
And seen the sun in clouded crimson rise,
So wrapt and veiled in mist, the sight received no harm.

Straight as a needle towards the pole may draw,
Advanced the car ; and veiled in white from view,
And olive wreathed, the form of one it bore,
Seen through a cloud of flowers attendant angels threw.

Clad in a mantle, as the verdure, green,
Beneath, the crimson caught from living flame ;—
Stirring the tremor of my soul ; unseen
The cause, that even from childhood in her presence came.

When though I knew her not, in trembling plight,
I turned to Virgil, for his strengthening aid :
But Virgil had withdrawn himself from sight,
Bereaved me of my friend, my sole dependence made.

Then turned I, at the sound of my own name,
Where stationed at the edged side of the car,
Commander of the angelic force she came,
Still veiled, as when the cloud of flowers fell from afar.

" Dante ! " she said ; and here I must record
The name she uttered :—" Wherefore is the need
To weep for Virgil ? Yet another sword
Erewhile shall pierce thee through, when thou shalt weep indeed."

Across the stream she turned on me her eyes,
Although the veil, descending from her head,
Wreathed like Minerva's, still was a disguise ;—
Right royally kept back the colder words she said :

" Look at me well :—Beatrice sure am I ;
And hast thou deigned thee to ascend the Mount ?
And hast thou learned where happiness may lie ?"—
Thus tauntingly she bid me take in my account.

With downcast eyes, as in the stream below
My face was mirrored, soon I turned in grief,
For such a weight of shame was on my brow,
That to the grassy bank I turned me for relief.

As to the gifted Mother, Son may bow,
Reproof had touched me sore with arrowy haste ;
The power that came from her I felt it now ;—
'Tis love that to the pity gives a bitter taste.

Silent she stood ; whereat the angelic train
Join with their voices in the Psalm of Peace :—
"In thee, Lord, have I hoped," so rang the strain
Unto this last ; "My feet hast set" ; and there they cease.

As showers of drifted snow, piled high, remain
On the live rafters of supporting trees
That clothe the back of Appeninia's chain,
Brought from Sclavonian climes by the rough northern breeze,

Melting, diffuse them into copious streams,
If so the roof falls in, beneath the sighs
Of the soft south, that temper'd with its beams
Unfettered find free course and in deep channels rise.

Thus was I fixed, without a sigh or tear ;
Till touched by note of heavenly harmonies,
The listening soul responsively may hear,
Bringing to eyes their tears, and to the breast its sighs.

But less the fount of tearfulness then broke,
And less my heaving breast the sigh supplied,
Than when accosting her, the words they spoke :
"Lady, why dost thou thus distress him?" pitying cried.

Unmoved, still on the right side of the car,
Her feet firm set against the ridge she stood ;
With voice that floated upward and afar,
Responsive to the angel's plaint, that saw my softened mood.

"Ye who your vigils keep in endless day,
And know not night, or sleep, how should you know
What passes in the world of his delay ;
Rather to him my answer comes, who weepeth so.

"That sorrow with transgression even stand.
Not his a fate by yonder orbs defined,
Directors of the seed cast o'er the land,
And marked in men for praise or blame, as stars combined.

"But in the largeness of the grace divine,
Descending from a higher altitude
In vaporous clouds;—visits none may define,
That feed the scattered seed, with gathered strength renewed.

"This one in his new life was blest with all
Exceeding virtues, that in him attained
A marvellous power;—but that rank seed will fall,
And flourish most in fruitful soil, if not restrained.

"Once I was near, aiding him with my will;
And my young eyes led him in paths aright;
With me he travelled willingly, until
On threshold of life's second stage, I fled from sight.

"Then he turned back, and other's talk would share;—
So soon as I had changed my mortal state
I was less dear to him, though grown more fair,
And as my virtues grew, so did his love abate.

"And swift his steps were turned in paths untrue;
Imaginary bliss he sought to find,
Which no fulfilment in its promise knew;
The inspiration of my wisdom left behind.

"Vainly in dreams, I strove to bend his will;
In other ways had his deliverance sought;
By night and day revisiting, until
I found the sword to stop the way, too short;

"And he must see where ruined souls abide:
Unto this end, the gates of death I reached:
The one who hitherward has been his guide,
With prayers and tears of him his watchful aid beseeched.

"'Tis not of ordinance divine assured,
That a new life be gained in the high sphere ;
That Lethe should be past, and life secured,
Without a signal given of the repentant tear."

PURGATORIO

CANTO XXXI

THE ARGUMENT

Beatrice continues her discourse, and Dante in contrition falls to the ground, when he is drawn swiftly through the river to the opposite shore, near to Beatrice.

Dante

PURGATORIO

CANTO XXXI

"ACROSS the sacred river where I stay,
Float back thy answer from the opposed shore,
If that I said sounds harsh and bitter, say
'It is not truth'; and then the thrust will harm no more.

"I will absolve thee if such be thy plea;
Say, 'It is true': and accusation given
In seeming harshness only then will be
Link binding to confession, firmer riven."

Propriety thereat became confused:—
The voice first moved and suddenly it stopped;—
A power within arresting whilst it used;—
For though I would have spoken, speech thereby seemed locked.

As, with the fragile bow, whose strength we try,
With too much tension on its corded arc,
Has less impulse to make the arrow fly,
And in uncertainty oft shoots beside the mark.

So I beneath the stress of that grave charge,
Brake into sobs and tears, mingled with sighs,
The voice its channel failing to enlarge;—
As thus she spake again; my faltering answer tries.

"When my regards towards thee did not tire,
All my endeavours spent on thee so much;
What thwarted thy advance, at my desire,
And why was lost that large expenditure on such?"

After the heaving of a bitter sigh
My lips were opened:—faint my voice replied,
"The things of time allured my steps, when I
Lost thee beyond recall; sight of thy face denied."

Then she—"Hadst thou been silent or would yet disclaim
The accusation, it had none the less
Been thy transgression; noted by the same
All-seeing Judge, who from His seat hears thee confess.

"But in our court it is the privilege,
Soon as confession's tears break from the cheek,
The sin's accuser makes the sharpened edge
Run counter to the wheel's revolving break.

"And as a better way the shame to bear
Of this thy error, whensoe'er again
Thou hearest the Syren's voice thou mayest beware;—
Whose song has so much grief divided in her strain.

"Hear now from me what should have been thy part,
When I no longer wore my mortal frame;
If pleased thee nought in nature or in art,
When that enclosed me, mixed, went to its earth the same:—

"Seeing nought charmed thee henceforth, why again
Another mortal thing shouldst thou desire?
Rather it had become thee in thy pain,
As there were none like me, to me thou shouldst aspire.

"Nor with a downward flight, pointed thy wing,
Anticipatory of another blow
In short-lived vanities, and a young thing;
Of other gauds erewhile the transient use to know.—

"The new-fledged, inexperienced bird will fly,
Once, twice, or thrice, athwart the fowler's snare;
But older and experienced birds espy
The harm that lurks within, and hence avoid with care."

With hanging head, and downcast eyes—a child
In earned rebuke I stood, defenceless, coy:—
"For greater grief if harmed by accents mild,
Look up at me and raise thy beard, once beardless boy."

With less resistance does the sturdy oak
Yield to the northern blast, uprooted lie,
Or by the southern wind;—the words she spoke
Yielded their answer;—by my beard rebuked was I;

And as my face, long in distress, was met
By hers in primal loveliness, my eyes
Closed to their use of light:—Beatrice yet,
Came back; the double nature in her no disguise.

Beneath her veil, across the verdant shore,
Passed out to me the old familiar sense
Of her own self:—than of those others more;—
Guardians that Heaven had sent, and in her train, from thence.

Repentance, punishing, now had its way;
Heart-breaking recollections with it came;
And vanquished, fallen on the ground I lay,
Feeling the sting was in her love, more than her blame.

Whilst none of those surrounding knew the cause;—
But when my heart to virtue was regained,
There one alone came near me; without pause
Of swiftness, drew me from above, and with firm hold retained

Across the stream; then only did I hear
Reaching the blessed shore, a sweet refrain,
"Asperges me"; from those, there standing near;—
Of such delight too great the memory to retain.

And where the pool was deep her arms held fast,
Submerged me for a moment, when the rest
With joy received me, out the river past;
And in a wreathed dance and song their joy expressed.

"Nymphs on the earth we were, now stars in heaven;
Before Beatrice to the world came down
We were ordained; unto her service given;—
Now lead thee to her eyes; but first direct thy own

"To those three orbs, whose light we left behind,
Of more ecstatic joy and depth profound,"
Thus sang they, and the while my looks inclined
From whence Beatrice took her course-nearing the ground.—

"Hold not thy gaze, behold before thee set
The emerald light, wherewith love did disarm,
And drew thy eyes, to eyes more brilliant yet
Grown, from above the skies, in doubled force of charm."

As in a glass the sun reflects its beams,
With no less ardour does its nature burn,
And in reflection doubled, it but seems
Not yet another, but variety that we discern.

Reader, of this I marvelled much, I own,
Seeing unchanged the incandescent light
Transmitted to its idol, but still one,
Filling my soul thereby with wonder and delight.

For this: that I might show the high-born tribe
Neglected acts behind the advancing three;
To the angelic dance my song inscribe;—
"Beatrice, turn that *he* thy holy eyes may see,

"Whose song thou wert, and faithful found; for thee,
Moved by thy love, he trod the paths of woe;
The grace thou showest, even to us shall be;
Unveil to him thy eyes; thy second beauty show."

Oh, splendour of Eternal Living Light!
Who, pale and wan, would dwell beneath the shade
Of his Parnassus; drink of founts less bright;
With mental vision too obscured the souls to aid;

Nor give to thee the record of that bliss,
Once he beheld, and now for thee can solve;
That thou mightst take it to thyself from this,
When in the air, to heavenly harmonies thou shalt dissolve.

PURGATORIO

Canto XXXII

THE ARGUMENT

The Celestial Escort prepares to depart, and Beatrice descends from the Car.

Dante is recalled from a day-dream to find her seated at the foot of the tall tree, where strange reverses happen to the Car, which he is instructed to record in the World, because of the evil therein.

Dante

PURGATORIO

CANTO XXXII

TO quench my ten years' thirst, I fixed my gaze;—
"Avert thine eyes," they warned, lest now the sight
Of so much brilliance should, in unveiled rays,
O'erpower my vision, faint with the immortal light.

Restful I turned, and could discern once more
The glorious procession moving round,
That had been hidden from my sight before
In the intensity that further vision bound.

Towards the seven-starred gate and central sun,
Backing their course; as with their shields in sign,
An army flies, till thereof every one
Circling is seen to turn, and duly forms in line.

As towards the car the heavenly escort bends
Guarding retreat, that it may pass before;—
The griffin on his way so softly wends
That not a plume is stirred, as his blest charge he bore.

Past the high wood, despoiled and leafless now,
By the crest serpent; we with steps joy bent
Followed their lead, till arrow's flight from bow
Thrice winged, Beatrice from the car made her descent.

And still I heard the murmur of the trees
Adam denuded, where I saw a plant
Of flowers and leaves bereft like unto these
Till bowery branches crowned the stem so sere and scant.

Such as in India, where none grows so tall;—
Umbrageously it spreads its tufted head,
And highest admiration gains from all,
As higher yet, and higher, widening branches spread.

Blessed art thou, the griffin, that tastes not,
Nor ever pecked the sweetness in the wood
That turns to bitterness of taste when got;—
As those may learn who eat of undigestive food.

Then all the stout-limbed and dismantled trees
Murmuring replied; and the voiced griffin too;
"So in the seed preserved the just abide."—
Leashing the car to the reft stem in trembling haste then flew.

How may our plants prepare in early spring
To push their buds, ere the celestial sign
Has mingled with the sun; nor burst their ring,
Till towards a higher star his chariot wheels incline?

Colouring with less of purple, more of rose,
The opening blossom that renews the plant,
In its bare branch, or lonely else it grows;
I apprehend it not, so must my notes be scant.

If, as in painter's art, I had arranged
My colours, with the model in my eyes,
How to a water rose a nymph was changed,
Fated my song, like hers, only to end in sighs.

Thus was I lulled to sleep, or sleep that feigned;—
When suddenly a flash of radiance flew,
Absorbed the veil of mist, and sense regained,
I heard a voice that called, "Arise, what dost thou do?"

Thou that shouldst see in flower, the fruited sweet
That angels eat of in unsated feast;—
Called by a voice, as at their Master's feet
Those heard on Tabor's Mount when earlier schools decreased.

Then as I turned, close standing by, I saw
The gentle lady who had guided through,
And made me pass the flood to reach the shore;—
"Where is Beatrice now?" as doubtfully I grew.

"Behold her seated underneath the bough
New grown; whilst her companions gather round;
The rest attendants on the griffin now,
Parted from us, their songs sweeter and more profound

Since his diffusive voice may not be known";—
And whilst her wistful eyes seclusion sought,
I found her seated on the turf alone,
Sole guardian of the car the griffin lately brought.

The seven nymphs circling round the cloistered shade,
Held in their hands aloft the lights that burned;
No gusty winds disturbing, as she said
"Thou that art in the forest now, with me returned

"Shalt dwell for ever, Citizen of Rome,
Whereof Christ is a Roman; but whilst here
See what reverses to the car will come,
And for the evil in the world record it there."

And I, to her behest, as to a law
Attentive, not with less speed than flash
From distant cloud, Jove's bird dart down I saw,
And from the yet unfruited tree the bark to snatch.

Loosing the car, so leashed, with all his force;—
The while it yielded as a ship forlorn
Is vanquished by the waves beyond its course,
Either to starboard, or to larboard, fiercely borne.

Lo and behold! a fox, greedy and fat,
Within the right side of the triumphal car!
Hung'ring he looked for all good things, whereat
My Lady, chiding him, he ran fast as he might and far.

Then came an eagle down, and from his breast
Plucked out the feathers, lining it with care,
Whilst from the Heaven there came a voice distressed,
"Alas! poor bark of mine, what evil freight to bear!"

Then from the earth beneath, between the wheels,
Issued a dragon with his forkèd tail,
As when an angry wasp its sting reveals,—
Shattered the stand thereof, making it no avail.

And there remained, lodged in the tall rank grass,
Mingled with down, plucked with much good intent
It might be;—grass that revives so soon as pass
The wheels;—swift as a breathed sigh when lips are rent.

And thus transformed, I saw the holy ark
Send out four heads, one to each corner tied;
And three in front crowned with two horns, I mark,
The other four alike, but with one horn supplied.

Secure as rock, mounted the ridge to ride,
There sat a Harlot with the wandering eyes;
And that none take it from him, at her side
A giant monster stood and close with kisses plies.

Till as on me she chanced her eyes to cast,
In jealous rage he scourged her; the show-car
Dislodged and dragged;—till in the wood at last,
Obscured from sight they passed, hid in the shades afar.

PURGATORIO

CANTO XXXIII

THE ARGUMENT

Beatrice rises and leaves the tree, placing her Seven companions in the front; then conversing with Dante, she predicts darkly to him distant events connected with her Car. Afterwards he is invited to drink of the waters of Eunoe (a Greek name signifying "good thoughts,") and thence is prepared to ascend with Beatrice towards the regions of Paradise.

Dante

PURGATORIO

Canto XXXIII

"THE Heathen, Lord, are come," changed the sweet psalm;—
Beatrice, listening to the notes had sighed;—
Her colour changed to burning red, from calm,
Seeming than Mary scarce less sad, the cross beside.

Then, rising from the ground, said, "Sisters mine,
Somewhile you see me not, but short the time,
And you again shall see me."—With a sign
She set the Seven in front, we following in the rhyme.

Yet scarcely had she paced ten steps the ground,
Her aspect changed; tranquil her eyes met mine:
"Conversing with thee, near to me be found,
And listening as thou wouldst, closely thine ear incline.

"Brother," she said, "say, hast thou not a mind
To question aught of me as thus we tread?"—
I like to some whom their superiors bind
In too much reverence, voice whose half has fled:

"Lady, of my desire thou knowest the good
Thou wilt inform me as may best beseem."—
And she: "Henceforth to rid thee of restraint, I would
That thou shouldst speak no more as man who has a dream.

"Know that the vase we saw the serpent brake,
Was, and is not:—ye who feel not the blow,
Believe, a sop God's vengeance will not slake,
Nor long without an heir, the self-plucked eagle show.

"For the car, grown a sham, became a prey,
And I who watched, with certainty repeat;—
To give to the near stars the time, that they
May rest secure, above all hindrance and defeat.

"In the which he, *Five Hundred, Ten, and Five*,[1]
The sent of God, shall slay the furious one,
And giant that transgressed with her to live;
But leave it dark, lest Fear and Sphinx should make thee shun.

"For that the intellect has not attained
To it as yet; but when the fact is, then
The Naiads that will solve the enigma dark,
Reveal it uncondemned for sin; nor blamed of men.

"Note thou, and as from me bear thou this word,
And set it as a sign of truth to them
Whose lives are but a race to death; record
How the tree was a second time robbed in its topmast stem.

"And any who would maim or rob that tree,
Blaspheme in fact the God who made it grow
For his own service, and to holy be;
Whereof the first soul ate, self-punishment to know.

"Thy genius sleeps, if it has not discerned
The reason why so excellent a thing
Should have her crown reversed, thy thoughts have yearned
In vanity towards Elsa's petrifying spring.

[1] Beatrice dying in the year 1290, the prophecy, ten years later, might seem fulfilled in the abolition of the Inquisition in Spain, 1813, during the Napoleonic Era, ending in the Five Hundred and Fifteenth year after the Vision.—TRANSLATOR.

"And if its pleasures had not dyed thee dark
As Pyramus, the berry, thou mightst know
In many ways God's justice did but mark
With interdict the Tree, its moral force to show.

"But as I see thy mind to stone is turned,
And dark in sin, dazzled, thou canst not write,
Depict at least what from me thou hast earned,—
Thy pilgrim staff with palm enwreathed bear well in sight."

Then I: "As wax will from a seal retain
The image set, so is thy gifted word
Unalterably fixed within my brain;—
Why should its meaning vault above my wished record?"

"Because, if thou wouldst know," she said, "the school
Which thou hast followed has no power given;
And so discordant is it in its rule,
As far from the Divine as earth from heights of heaven."

Then I replied: "Time I remember not
I was enstranged from thee, there conscience brave
Yields no remorse."—"If thou hast this forgot,"
Smiling—"At least recall how lately thou hast passed through
Lethe's wave;

"And if the dense mist of thy argument
Does not within some dark oblivion hide
A wilful fault, that in attendance went;—
Which thy remembrance now no longer may abide.

"Hence shall my words of verity disclose
So much as in discourse may be revealed
To thy rude sight."—As now the sun uprose,
And with retarded steps towards his meridian wheeled

The Seven that in the vanguard held their lights,
Stood in full gaze at the unwonted glare,—
As if in forest shade of coolness, heights
Of Alpine scenery glanced through opening branches bare.

And right before us to my sight arose,
As from one font, Tigris and Euphrates,
That parting friendship different channels chose:—
"Oh, light and glory of our race! Why part so these?

"What is this water that is seen to start
From the same course, and then to part astray?
This owest thou me."—"Matilda should impart
To thee that knowledge now; entreat her, she will say."

As one who from herself the blame would shift,
Spake the fair damsel: "This and things yet more,
Tell him by me, and be thou sure the drift
Through Lethe has not hid it from him o'er and o'er."

Beatrice then:—"Perhaps the greater cure
Which overpowers within all selfish thought,
Has made it to his memory's eyes obscure;
But see where Eunoe flows hard by, and thence is brought:

"There lead him, and before as was thy use,
Revive his fainting virtue in that wave."—
And as a gentle soul makes no excuse,
But in another's will, her own, well pleased will have,

So did the gentle lady lead me there;—
Saying to Statius, "Come thou too with him."—
Had space allowed, reader, I would declare
The unending sweetness of that draught drank at its brim.

And I returned from the most holy wave,
Revived, and seeming like a plant to rise
With leaves renewed, when freshening waters lave;—
So was I then made pure, and fit to mount the starry skies.

PARADISO

Canto I

THE ARGUMENT

Dante here directs his prayer to the Universal Light, for guidance in describing the marvels which he sees whilst ascending with Beatrice towards the polar stars and the Central Sun.

Dante

PARADISO

Canto I

THE glorious Light of Him that moves, surrounds,
And penetrates the Universe, when there
Enlightening all the more or less is found :—
Into a Heaven most filled through the translucent air

I fly, to see such things I would depict,
Had power not failed me, hence returned below,
Because approached, they seemingly restrict
Our intellect its height, nor memory's force can show.

Truly so much as I may now retain
Of that most holy Kingdom's treasure blent
Within my thought, shall in my song remain :—
Oh, good Apollo, for this latest work thy aid be sent,

And take this vessel in the powerful stay
Of thy command, as in a former course
Towards Parnassus once I jiged thy way,
Be with me now, or I might fail in this discourse.

Enter into my breast and breathe, as there
From out its sheath once Marcia's limbs it drew.
Oh, virtue lend thyself, divinely fair,
If but as shadow I might show that Kingdom new.

Come near, make manifest thy lovely law,
And crown me after with such leafy spray
As shall be worthy of the things I saw;—
If in low flight, Father, I gather such, I may

Not triumph as a Cæsar, nor in wit
A Poet (so disgraced in human will),
That wears the Delphic Laurel's shine transmit
To the Penean Daphne, jovial airs to fill.

Small sparks from out of greatest flames we see;—
Than mine, another mightier voice may sound,
As of Cyrrhœn citizens acclaimed to be;—
For mortal's fire diverse lighting the world is found.

Away from this;—where circles four join three,
In mightier course and with a larger star
To be conjoined; than worldly lights to be
More tempered in a brilliant force than others are.

'Tis morning now, wherein so much of eve
Is blent;—to where the empyrean white
Has filled the air, whilst black behind we leave;—
Beatrice turned, and on her left held me in flight,

Facing the sun. Not swifter towards the skies
Vaulted an Eagle that had fixed its eye;
And as from out a sunbeam, beam might rise,
So was retained in me the power to mount on high.

And as a Pilgrim to his wish will turn,
At that great height her eyes in mine infused
Imaginations I might well discern,
Nor fix my sight upon a sun to custom so unused,

Where much is known, that to the Earth below
Is hid in mercy to its human race.
Unhurt I wait not long where mightiest glow
Seemed as of molten iron poured into fire through space.

And at that instant, daylight above day
Increased, as if adorned by other Sun;
Beatrice where its wide circumference lay
Had fixed her eyes,—whose far off light had then begun

In me a relish, such had Glaucus known
Whilst tasting of the weed beneath the sea,
As made him with new gods consort alone:—
Such simile I meant only in word to be,

But not in power: similitude too low
For him the keeper of a larger grace;
And if the Sun had made in me to know
A new creation,—Love of Heaven, Thy power I trace

In that circumference thy Eternal thought
Made manifest to me, inspired my song,
So tempered and attuned, with sunlight fraught,
As not in depths beneath, where mist and rain belong.

The novelty of sound, and the great light,
All their effects I had desired to know,
But found my voice to fail me in that height;—
Whilst she who there beheld me as I was below;

And well acquainted with my soul's unrest,
Had first required of me an open speech,
And then began:—"Thou hast within thy breast
Too much of false imaginings, for that thy eyes can reach

"And might discern; but thou art so bereft;—
Thou art not on the Earth as well believed;
Nay, lightning following in its pathway set
Was not more swift than thou, to run, and be received."

If at the first I doubted, now her smile
Had reassured me in the word she spake;
Although another doubt behind, awhile
Perplexed me, as I answered for her sake:

"I should be well contented here to stay
In this magnificence when I relive;—
If in my resurrection form I may,
As in my nature, all my admiration give."

Then she, oppressed, and with a sigh replied;—
Her eyes directed towards me with a look
Such as a mother might, delirious child:—
"That thing the most desired its order has forsook.

"Where we may see the higher creature formed
Out of eternal will, which was, and is,
And holds the former model so transformed:—
An order, as I say, inclining all to this

"Whence Nature in its diverse forms had part;
Some nearest to their source, and some less near.
As they were moved, from different ports they start,
In the great sea of being to the same point they steer.

"This one as towards the moon shall carry fire;
And this, the mortal heart, come not so near;
This pressed to Earth in crowds might less aspire;—
Not the mere creatures could the arrowed bow uprear;

"But those who hold their intellect and love
In Providence, adopted much for heaven;
Giving them quietude from Light above,
Whither they fly to whom the swiftest wings are given.

"These whilst remaining in their place decreed,
Bear for their standard, Virtue, which so draws,
That those who follow it have joy indeed;—
Are not amenable to those material laws

"Which hinder Art, and feed the sordid taste,
In that departure where so many run,
Who, having power to paint, but paint for waste,
As lightning scatters from the cloud, in force begun.

" Not so esteemed, not thus admired of all,
Be thy ascent, nor like a river's flow
From mountain's top to take a downward fall,
Descending from a height to depths as far below.

" The marvels here revealed to thee at first
Impede and lay thee in the lowest place ;
From quiet Earth the living fire will burst."
Then upward towards the Heaven she turned again her face.

PARADISO

CANTO II

THE ARGUMENT

Arrived at the lowest star, the Moon, Beatrice converses with Dante concerning the differing apportionments of the Divine light; suggested by the shadows in the Moon.

Dante

PARADISO

Canto II

O H ye that in light barks have followed mine,
And kept behind, desirous most to hear
Her singing as she cleaves the watery brine,—
Return, revisit your own shores, nor venture near,

Lest, peradventure, ye should lose your guide,
And in mid-ocean lost have sore return ;
The watery way I take none took beside
Adventurous, and from none beside might learn.

Apollo guides, Minerva breathes the gale,
And a new muse discovers me the Pole :—
Ye others few whose eager quest might hail
Foretaste of angels' food, that never sates the soul,

Bring all your wit to follow in the track
Of this my ship, that marks a furrow now
In front, on either side sends equal back,—
Nor see less glory than on Jason fell, following the plough.

The thirst created that perpetual draws
The godlike to its kingdom, on will bear
With rapid flight till into heaven it soars ;—
Beatrice thus, and I was in her guardian care.

Swift as an arrow started from the bow,
Soaring, I gazed upon a wondrous sight,
And turned my face to hers in fear, lest now
The works I did might not be hidden in that light.

Towards me her beauteous face she turned and said,
"Direct thy thoughts in thanks to God, as yet
Unto the nearest star thou hast been led."
That in the sunfire clear, in adamantine cloud seemed set,

Received us in the eternal living pearl,—
As if a watery drop had in delay
A sunbeam held within it, that might curl,
United as one essence, undissolved to stay.

If I, whilst in the flesh might not conceive
How one dimension could another hold,—
Much more might one desire, and then believe
If of two natures joined, of God, and Man were told.

Not demonstrated, but fast held in faith,
As at the first, by the first man believed.—
Then I replied: "My Lady, as thou saith,
I render thanks that from the mortal world I am received.

"But tell me whence arise those spots of shade,
Seen in the moon by dwellers there below,
That fabled talk of Cain thereby have made?"
With a slight smile: "If mortals can such fancies show,

"At least the key of sense ought thou to hold,
That sting of arrow might not bite thee now
Admired wonders to thy sight unfold;
If reason had not clipp'd thy wing—what thinkest thou?"

And I replied, "From this height things I see,
In different aspect and of varied shade."
And she: "Like this thy creed of false shall be
Submerged in argumentive truth, with listening's aid.

"The eight starr'd sphere has in it many lights,
That with diversity revolving shine,
Of rare, or dense, as these held in their flight,
Denote a differing power as different orbs incline.

"But one sun's virtue each is known to suit,
The more or less distributed to all;
So virtues differing, bear appropriate fruit,
Though out of one, there came leading astray, thy fall.

"Then of that dimness the true cause thou'lt know,
As by request, why different, things appear,
How in one body gross and lean both show,
And how the pages of a book seem dark or clear.

"If at the first was pierced a chasm wide,
In the eclipse, the light that still resides
Would have revealed it on the other side;
But this did not, and thus the fallacy decides.

"If this be proved, other opinions too,
In all their falsity should then appear;
If light is hindered that it pass not through,
Some obstacle 'tis plain prevents its passage clear.

"And every beam impeded makes rebound,
As colour will when seen returned by glass,
That in the lead behind it is not found;
Or wilt thou say refracted beams all other beams surpass,

"Take then an instance more decided still
In thy experience; showing where your arts
Have been derived, and prove as sure it will
How from one fount alone a wandering streamlet starts.

"Three mirrors take; one place beyond the rest,
And turn thy eyes the foremost not to see,
Then pass behind these, and within thy quest,
See light beneficent arising from all three.

"Reflects each mirror, equal in its force
The light so shed; there is no need to stretch
Thy vision, reaching to the farthest source,
Convinced that splendour equal does arise from each.

"Or if the subject be the Sun's warm ray,
Melting from its first colour the cold snow
As this is laid; so mightst thou see the way
That living light has made thy trembling aspect show.

"Within the heaven of the divinest peace
Circles a body, which its virtue gives
To all that is so held in its embrace,
To each and every Orb that in its essence lives.

"All various in distinctions these abide,
Prepare them for their end, and grow their seeds;
These are the organ of the world outside,
Vanishing from thy sight; that lower yet recedes.

"Regard me well as thus I lead thee on
Through pathways to the place so much desired;
I am thy guide become, thy only one,
Where virtuous movements are alone by heaven inspired.

"As music's art beats to the spirit's touch,
Heaven that with her lights has made it fair,
Out of the thought profound had formed it such;
Sent forth the image, sealed, imprest it there;

"And as the soul has, hidden in your dust
To diverse members differing powers decreed,
Comformable to power, dissolve it must,
Bound into sovereign unity that multiplies star seed.

"Virtue diverse has in its laws so bound
A precious frame, that thus it might arrive
To that which as the life in you is found,—
A native light from whence the virtues you derive;

"And mingling with it in the body so,
Has by the eye its brightness there expressed;
And thus is proved that light from light must grow,
A principle, in dense or rare, as in its bounty blest."

PARADISO

Canto VII

THE ARGUMENT

Beatrice continuing her ascent with Dante towards the Sun, discourses with him on the Fall of Man, and his resurrection.

Dante

PARADISO

Canto VII

SALVATION, Glory of the God most high;
In thy blest fire the nation's light renew:
As upward from their music notes we fly,
The orbs beneath like sparks receded from our view.

Facing the light, and past their dance remote:—
"Speak to me, speak, as was thy wont,"—but stopt
In reverential awe my doubtful note,
As in her name the B. and I. C. E. was dropt [1]

In homage that she drew;—always possessed.—
She, with some shade of suffering, seemed less pleased,
But answered to this tone of mine distressed,
With smile, as once her happy name the fire had eased:

"Assenting to my council as was fit,
Within thy consciousness a doubt I read,
Lest vengeance might not punishment remit,
Nor justice from just penalty of sin recede.

"But I will solve so much within thy thought,
As thou whilst listening to my theme shalt own,
To thy presentment greater sense is brought;
Than one man's unborn progeny, past punishment disown;

[1] The familiar name given to Beatrice.

"Or virtue should allow curbed side by side:—
So that the human race has weakly grown
In that great error ages to abide,
Till in man's nature should the Word of God in peace be sown.

"Unseated once, now with his Maker blent
In the high sun of His eternal love;—
As lifts thy vision whence His rays are sent,
Know that the creature good, sincere made from above,

"In first creation, had abandoned brief
His Paradise, wherein he turned astray
Out of the path of truth, which was his life,—
A punishment that on the Cross was seen to lay,

"That nature might thereby have recompence.—
Not so: nor was that person justly killed,
Regarding him who suffered, and from whence
So much unlike that nature was in him revealed.

"Nor might a deed so diverse have been given
As made both Jews, and God, pleased with a death,
That made the earth to shake, and opened Heaven:—
Nor would the bond more binding be, because thou saith,

"A court of justice might such vengeance mete;
But I perceive how thy contracted mind,
Thought within thought, has made the knot complete
Which thou with great desire expected to unbind.

"Thou sayst, 'I well discern the thing I hate,—
But because God so willed, He hid it from me,
How our redemption could be in such state.'—
"And the decree, my brother, hidden from all must be.

"Who in the flame of Love have not yet earned
Their growth of genius;—verily, a sign
So many marvelled at, and few discerned,
Would seem a mode the more esteemed in that design.

" Goodness supreme would of itself destroy
In its own burning brightness every ill,
Which its eternal beauty would alloy,
Or that from out another medium might distil ;

" Having no end, because unmoved in word
From His own image, that Himself had sealed ;
Without a medium, in abundance poured,
Liberal to all, not subject to a newer thing revealed.

" The more conformable, the more at peace ;
As holy ardour from each ray emits
Similitude ; and with it Life's increase
To that nobility, which though it fell, it still befits.

" By sin alone disfranchised in the fall,
And made dissimilar to highest good ;
A dignity so lost beyond recall,
Because the lesser light in him had been withstood.

" Nor could the man recover from his blow
In the just punishment of self-delight ;
Your nature by that total overthrow
Lost, as his seed, your Paradise by right.

" Nor though thou covet, cannot reinstate
A lost inheritance, nor pass the guard :
Or God had in His kindness kept the gate,
Or the Man's folly, of himself, had satisfied award.

" Fix now thy eyes on the profound abyss
Of the Eternal council, as thy sight
My words far reaching, yet may follow this :
Where none but humble and obedient souls can pierce the light,

" Whilst disobedience still holds on its way ;
And for this reason that the victim gave
The larger satisfaction : and now say
If God contracted with his life, lost life to save,

"Was it his own, or both his view was toward?
But as the work was more esteemed by those
Than other works they held;—had in regard
To goodness of the heart, from out of which they rose,

"The world, Divine Benevolence had sent,
Proceeding forth and out of His own ray,
With fragments from above remained content:
Nor was there between latest night and the first day

"Such glorious procession in the height,
As chased, one saw the other vanquished fly;
When God, in the full presence of His might
Gives unto man a strength to mount towards Him more nigh,

"Whence by his action sole he made his fall:—
And failed all modes that justice might require,
If God's incarnate Son, humble withal,
By His great works had not so satisfied desire;

"And having thus disclosed Him passed from there:
For in His presence, as He is, am I.—
Thou say'st, I see the fire, the water, air,
Earth, and the vaporous mists that rise thereby;

"These from corruption come, and short their stay,
For this throughout creation was ordained,
That things so given be not cast away,
But through corruption, in security retained.

"The angels, Brother, and this clearer heaven
Wherein thou art, tells of creative force
Remaining, and in its perfection given,
Whilst all the elements so named run in their course—

"Till the creation's truths may be disclosed
Within that star they turned to vanity;
Created, was the matter which they hold;
Created, the true knowledge that informs thereby.

"The animals diverse, and plants that grow
Towards their completion, powerfully draw
The rays of sacred light that move them so;
But this, *our life*, was made no middle flight to soar

"To heights benignant, as beloved the best;
In God's desire fulfilled the most of all;—
So might the resurrection be expressed,
And flesh restored, in which our parents made their fall."

PARADISO

CANTO XXII

THE ARGUMENT

Dante, oppressed with the novelty of his new surroundings, turns to Beatrice, who councils him as to the enmity he will have to endure when he returns to the world. After St. Benedict has appeared and conversed with him, he looks back for a moment on the planetary system beneath him, noting particularly the stars of his nativity in the sign Gemini.

Dante

PARADISO

Canto XXII

AMAZED in stupor, turned towards my guide,
Her aid I seek;—and as a child might run
To that wherein it can the most confide,
And as the mother soothes her pale and breathless son,

With voice whose tone alone like hers can aid;
Beatrice then:—"Knowest thou not that now
Thou art in Heaven, where all is holy made,
And with a righteous zeal does all things there endow,

"Which has transmuted all the former songs
That held thy power at first within my smile;
As to a louder note it now belongs,
Mingled with all thy praise, as thou wilt know erewhile.

"Already thou mayst hear the vengeful cry
Which the first signal gives, and is the rim
Of that which thou must see before thou die;—
A sword not held above in haste, nor slow to him

"Who, seeing, watches its descent with fear.
Other illustrious spirits thou shalt see
Within the vista of my words appear;
And eyes well pleased as thine directed then will be

"Towards a hundred orbs blending their light,
And with such splendour, making more display;—
Whilst in their spheres revolving seem more bright,
Because their effluence joined, blends in a mutual ray."

I was as one who fails to understand
The point desired, of it too much had feared;—
When one, the largest pearl of all that band,
The most translucent, to enlighten me appeared.

And from within, I heard him say—"If thou
Couldst see as I the love that makes us blend
In so much ardour, thou wouldst others show;—
And that thy expectation may not wait for that high end,

"I will make answer to thy thought, confide
The truth concerning it as meets thy ken:
That mountain with Cassino on its side
Was once the haunt of ignorance and wicked men;

"And I am he that bore them the first time
His name, who was the carrier to the earth
Of truth, that holds so much of the sublime;
And much of grace was shed on me from shining worth,

"As I restored from baseness of their way
The impious worshippers the world seduced.
Those other flames around me seen to stay
Were men enkindled by it, and their warmth diffused

"In growth of flowers and holiness of fruit:
That is Maccario, and that Romoaldo:
These are my brethren that with steps to suit
Within the cloister's shade a healthy heart could show."

Then I to him:—"The love which thou hast shown
In speaking to me gives a semblance true
Of those, the like in ardour I have known,
Much as a Rose dilates whilst in the sun it grew.

"Therefore, I pray thee, father, to impart,
And say if I might share the grace I note,
And well imagine to be in thy heart."
Then he:—"Brother, thy wish shall be fulfilled beyond thy hope;

"And far above those others wish and mine;—
Here is matured, made perfect in the soul
What each desires, and in it each design
Has everything become beyond its first control.

"For this is not the place where things prevent;
But infinite ascent is made to where
Thy vision now directed thus is sent,
Beyond the Jacob's ladder held in the angels' care,—

"Where to ascend it now scarce one will turn
From earth his feet, and where that rule of mine
Remains in writing only to discern
The walls that once were Abbey's, reared with much design,

"Now turned to sepulchres; and the monk's hood
Become a sack wherein to garner meal;
And fruit that feeds the heart with folly's food:—
Not for such pleasure thus did God His purpose there reveal,

"Though much the Church regards them then and there;
Not of God's parentage at His demand,
Even more vile than other brutish men,
As mortals in their flesh have grown to understand,

"And failed to see how from an acorn grows
A goodly oak.—Peter himself began
Without the gold and silver:—I, those
With prayer and fast:—Francis his convent built, a humble man.

"Thyself so kept in principles as theirs
Shall see the error which the others hold,
And seeing this—how white as black appears:
In truth was Jordan's water in its course of old

"Not made a greater marvel, than the sea
Should part its way when God has willed it so;
And by his aid a miracle would be."
This said he, and retired within his set to glow.

My lady, with a sign, bade me ascend
And follow where his flight had been inclined,
If virtue such as his in me might blend:—
Though hence to mount so high, looked far to one behind,

That could not trust with equal strength his wing.
Reader of this, if I might ere return
Unto the holy Triumph, I should bring
A stricken heart and sin's bewail thou couldst not learn,

Who not so much as in and out the flame
Hast jagged thy finger:—I who saw the sign
That follows Taurus, from within it came.—
Oh, glorious stars, so full of virtuous light benign;

(Such as I am), my genius born of you,
Ascending to the Father in this life
Of mortals, since first Tuscan air I drew;—
And when grace gathered in me seemed more rife

To enter, mingling with high circle there,—
From your revolving region I must part,—
To whom I breathed devotedly my prayer,
In virtue's ardent passion grown, gave you my heart.

"Thou who hast come so near a last salute,"
Began Beatrice—"it becomes thee well
To have the light about thee, clear, acute,
And therefore now thy sight may serve thee well,

"Look down, and see how far the world of voice
Has been removed, beneath thy feet to stay,
So that thy heart, though sad, may yet rejoice,
And tell to the triumphant throng this joyful way."

Turning my face, I saw within its course
The seven-starr'd sphere, and smiled to see the earth
Still held its old resemblance full in force,—
So that the council I had heard seemed honest worth.

I saw the daughter of Latona fair,
Without the shadow that perplexed me sore.
In old beliefs I held of dense or rare ;—
The aspect of thy son, Hyperion, as of yore ;

And circling near him, Mai and Dione ;—
I saw Jove's course mid-way 'twixt sire and son ;
Their changing aspects could more clearly see ;
The seven increased in size, in mightier course to run ;

The net of stars, that furious seemed to burn ;
And the Eternal Twins I saw fly past
Like hills of fire,—all these I could discern ;
Then to the beauteous Eyes upward my gaze I cast.

PARADISO

Canto XXIII

THE ARGUMENT

Beatrice now directs Dante's attention to a beautiful Garden, which he is able to distinguish in a subdued light. He sees a Star displaced from its position.

Dante

PARADISO

Canto XXIII

LIKE as a bird within some loved retreat,
In an embowered nest, waits for the night
To pass, that she may feed her broodlings sweet,
On food, hid in the fields, revealed by morning's light;

Her eye attentive fixed for the first gleam,
In ardent expectation of the Sun
That will renew amidst its brightening beam,
A labour which she loves, so soon to be begun:

Thus did my Lady wait with watchful look,
Expectant, towards a place where, in the height,
The Sun to us a tardier movement took;
Whilst I desiring watched, as something new to sight.

Nor long I wait,—for opening to my ken
The heavens in splendour to increase appear;
And said Beatrice: "See the triumph, when
The gathered hosts are gleaned from out the circling sphere."

Then seemed her face with ardour new to glow;
And in her eyes such fulness of delight,
As past my power of making others know;—
And as a varying moon, effaced by solar light,

Depicts in heaven its ever-changeful sign,—
So now, above a thousand times illumined,
A Sun shone out that never could decline;
Within its brilliant force supernal light assumed.

And by its living brightness so transposed
The former, that a darkness seemed to send
Where unaccustomed vision was opposed :—
"Oh, loved Beatrice, thou my guide and dearest friend"!

"That which has given surprise so much to thee
Is virtue; to thy health not yet been given ;—
Herein the wisdom and the power we see,
Which opens up a path from far-off Earth to Heaven."

And like the fire that, held within a cloud,
Breaks from its bond, and to the Earth will fall,
Out of its nature was my soul allowed
From a rich banquet to make feast, the mind might not recall.

"Open thine eyes;—see what I am: this while
Thou hast seen things, that powerful, impressed,
And made thee equal to sustain my smile."—
I was as one who would recall a far-off dream supprest,

That genius could in vain to mind restore;—
So when I heard this offer, was renewed
Into such gratefulness as book may more
Omit, than give, in semblance back reviewed;

For might I sing with all the borrowed tongue
Of Polyphymnia and her sisters, fed
On choicest milk for nourishment of song,
Her holy smile,—the thousand part of truth would not be said;

As to her holiness such facts belong:
And thus depicted, Paradise became
The dedication of my sacred song;
For as I saw her there, depicted was the same.

Not with the overwhelming thought of fear
That burdened mortals on their shoulder throw,
Nor to be blamed if seen that fear to bear :—
A pilot skilled,—not in a paltry bark the seas would plough.

"Why does my face enamour thee, that so
Thou dost not turn thee to the garden fair,
Beneath the rays of Christ;—to flowers that blow;
Where is the Rose, who in the Word Divine the flesh did wear.

"Whilst odorous lilies mark the goodly way."—
Beatrice thus; and to her council I
Attentive turned, my weakly sight to stay,
And in the shelter of a clouded beam its force would try.

Opened in shade, a field of flowers I saw :—
Although the splendour had become more dim,
The brightness still remaining as before,
Only its hidden source might not be seen within.

Virtue benign! that which was there expressed,
Exalted above me in that large place,
Whereon my eyes could not endure to rest :
The name of the fair Flower, that in my case

Duly at morn and eve invoked, has bound
My soul to celebrate with greater zest;
And as light in me mingling there was found,
Depicted in some measure what the star possessed :

I saw it fall from heaven as taper's light,
Formed in a circle likened to a crown,
Engirded, and revolving round its might;
And in its fall make melodies the soul might own,

As if a thunder-cloud enwrapt the lyre;
And so much with the sapphire there was crowned
As seemed of Heaven itself, the light sapphire.—
"I am angelic love in the high rapture bound,

The heart's spring and the bourne of our desire."
And turned towards her: "Lady of Heaven, now own
That following thy Son has made thee higher
Within the sphere supreme; and therefore it is known

"Around thee circle melodies of song;—
Making thee so distinct from other light,
That Mary's name floats all the air along:—
A royal mantle that enwraps the world's delight

"With more of warmth and strength, than in the wing
Of God's protection, and the robe to be
Above us";—with its inner edge a thing
As at a distance where I stood I might not see.

For not to eyes like mine was given the force
To follow there a coronal of fire,
Which so exalted seemed above its source:—
And as a child will stretch its arms in fond desire

Towards the parent whence it nurture drew,
So doth the soul that flame has touched aspire:
As light with light the candles will endue;
That its own excellence and love these might acquire:

As was to Mary manifestly given:—
So to my prescience still remained as sweet,
The songs they sang unto the queen of heaven;—
Oh, what abundance has she sown, and how replete!

Those to revive, and joy of harvest find,
Who wept in Babylon their exile tears;
And where they left their gathered gold behind;
Where in the triumph of God's Son and Mary there appears

Another victory, that therein is set
Beneath the lofty triumph of that one;—
And where the council, old and new, has met
With him who holds the key of so much glory won.

PARADISO

CANTO XXIV

THE ARGUMENT

Beatrice invites Saint Peter to converse with and examine Dante concerning his Faith, which ended satisfactorily. Saint Peter gives him a Commission and his blessing.

Dante

PARADISO

Canto XXIV

"OH, ye Elect! to the great Supper come
Of the blest angels; whereof ye may eat
In plenitude; let fall to this one crumb
Of the abundance of God's grace, life's span to meet;

"And power bestow on his immense desires:
As the refreshing dewdrops always ye
Drink of that fountain which his thoughts inspires!"
Thus spake Beatrice; and delighted souls I then could see

Drawn, as towards a pole, in comet's flame,
And like a horologe the first seemed set,
So to revolve, that weighted thought became
A quiet thing; another in its flight had met

With different carolling of thought; with dance
Flew in rich cadence, fast, and then more slow.
The one whose beauty did the most entrance
Seemed fire, that in delight surpassed all others glow.

And round about Beatrice thrice they flew,
With such a song, so full of the Divine,
Imagination's power fails to endue
My pen, as far above the writing to define.

Not here my fancy's colours could be blent
In living hues, nor speech thereof enfold.
"Oh, holy Sister mine! thy prayer thus sent
In thy devoted love has my dismissal told

"From this bright sphere; since strengthened in this fire
I give my Lady all my thought, began
From her high converse, which did thus inspire."
And she: "Oh, Light Eternal, given to that great man

"To whom our Lord left in his charge the key
To lift the portal of a wondrous bliss;
Visit this one, so swift and grave to be,
As it may please thee, ask him now his Faith in this,

"Which made thee once to walk upon the sea:
If he loves much, hopes much, and well believes,
Light in thine eyes, no thing is hid from thee,
And all that would displease, in equal light perceives.

"Become a Citizen, see if in him is wrought
The truthful Faith this glorious Kingdom bears;
Speak, as seems good, to him I here have brought."—
And as the Student arms himself and well prepares,

But speaks not till the question is proposed
For proof, as mindful of another end,
Which might afford a reason if disclosed:
Waiting, that question and profession might both blend:

"Good Christian," then he said, "tell me thy thought,
In what Faith does consist?" My forehead turned
Towards the Light, I inspiration sought,
And from Beatrice in her look approval learned,

For water from my font flowed from within.
"As Grace is given me, I will now confess,"
(Thus to the first High Primate I begin)
"And by my speech will all my inward thought express

"As thus:—The manner of it, Father, so is writ
By thy loved Brother, whom Rome tied to thee
In good accord. 'Faith is the substance knit
To things hoped for, an evidence of that we do not see.'

"And such an essence of the Faith it seems."
Again I heard: "Answered in good intent
And well directed, if such Faith beseems
The substance; for on this depends the argument."

Then I, again: "The largeness of the things
And their deep meaning, lately, I have seen,
Unfits the sight below, as custom brings:
To sole belief, I leave, what highest hope has been

'To those who substance take, with much content:
In the belief of this I herein see
A syllogism, less its side, is meant;
And thus contented, make the argument agree."

And then I heard: "If those who live below
Acquire through doctrine, intellect, and thought,
Sophists in that place could not genius show."
Thus inspiration from the flame of Love was brought.

Then added: "Much is known treasured there
In money which they hold of good or light:
Say if thou hast it in thy purse's care?"
And I: "Yes, have it, and it is so round and bright

"That nothing can I doubt of in the make."
And then came forth out of the depths of light
A Splendour: "This the gem for whose dear sake
All other values in the purse fall down in weight,

"Whence came it to thee?" I: "The overflow
Of Holy Spirit, which diffused around
Over the old and the new skin, has so
Convinced me in its point, where else obtuse I found.

"Convinced in propositions, new and old,
Which holds for thee the Word Divine then say."
"The proof, it seems to me," I said, "is told
In works that follow: nature did not Iron lay

"Upon the block, or molten, fired to glow."
Came the response: "How then can they aver
That what they work in is the same, or how
Can this be proved, and yet none else it is they sware?"

"If Christianity," said I, "returned
Into the world, without a miracle,
One of a hundred scarce it would discern,
As thou thyself in poverty and fast beseemed it well,

"And as a rustic sowed the goodly tree,
Which then was living, since is much defaced."
And ended thus, the Court of Heaven's decree
Resounded through the Sphere, "One God be praised

In melody that is not reached by song.—
The Officer from branch to branch that drew
Examination, saw the sprout among
The latest that my apprehension clearly knew,

And recommenced: "The Grace on thee bestowed
Wide as thy thought, an open speech should show:
As those who would discharge a debt they owed;
And that which I approve, as from a fount should flow.'

Again he spake: "Explain belief to me,
And why to such belief thy offering give?"
"Oh, Holy Father, Spirit, that I see
Is as thou see'st, as believed by thee I too believe,

"As towards the Sepulchre, thy younger feet
With swiftness ran,"—thus to him I begin:
"Thou wouldst in other form that I repeat,
Make manifest belief, in eagerness therein

"And the same reason for it would require."
Then added thus: "In one God I believe,
Eternal, sole, that moves with one desire
All Heaven, not else impelled their all of Love to give;

"And that belief, moreover, have not proved
By metaphysics and philosophy;
But as a truth that heretofore has moved
In Moses, and the Prophets, and the Psalmody:

"Through the Evangelists, and those who wrote,
Because their ardent spirits there could feed,
And to the Eternal Three belief devote,
Believing that the essence is in One so Threed,

"As if in suff'rance, and conjoined to be.
To that profound condition of Divine
As moves me now, I set my seal, and see
More willingly the doctrine these could once define.

"This is the principle, the spark divine
Which so dilates into a living flame,
That like a star of Heaven in me will shine."
And as the Master who, well pleased, has heard the same

Embraces with congratulations when
The Servant brought the news, is silent now;
Thrice girt me with a song and blessing then,
Light Apostolic;—whose behest as debt I owe.

PARADISO

CANTO XXV

THE ARGUMENT

He resolves to be the Poet of his Faith. Seeing the two Apostles—Saints James and John—Beatrice introduces to him Saint John, who regards him doubtfully at first, but at her intercession enters into conversation, inquiring his attainments and his motive for the visit.

He afterwards proclaims his high commission.

Dante

PARADISO

Canto XXV

IF it should happen that my sacred song,
Wherewith my hands have clasped the earth and heaven,
And kept me lean, should conquer cruel wrong,
That found me, sleeping, lamb from a fair sheepfold driven,

The enemy of wolves in that revolt;
With other voice and in another guise,
I will return a Poet; at that font
Baptismal only will I take my cap as prize.

Not else, but in the faith which brings to man
The mind of God, an entrance give me now,
When holy Peter will my merits scan,
And place the laurel wreath upon my aching brow.

Soon after that a light appeared from those
Who, at the first, out of a gathered throng
Christ leaving, for his earliest vicars chose;
And as my Lady saw him come the group among,

She joyfully exclaimed, "Behold! admire,
Him for whose sepulchre they went to Gaul;
And where the dove he fed would oft retire,
Near its companion feed, and murmur love's recall.'

From an assembly here a chieftain rose,
Amidst a glorious throng that fed would be,
Praising the food of Heaven that overflows :—
And after the first 'gratulations made with me,

This one in silence fixed on me his gaze,
As doubtful if by my own will I came ;—
Beatrice then as turned towards him says :
" Thou living soul ! who, living, wrote of this our mansion's fame,

" And made resound the hope of the high Sphere,—
Thou knowst how soon is changed the outward mien
When Jesus makes it three-fold bright appear ;
Assure thyself this one in mortal's world is seen.

" Accustomed in our rays to be matured."—
And thus apprised, advanced that second flame,
When with my lifted eyes I felt assured
I bent my head too low when salutation came.

" Since grace has willed it, thou shouldst thus abuse
Our Emperor's ruling, and, ere death might come,
The hidden secrets of his council use,
In languishment of hope for a beloved home

" Where thou and such as these their comfort find ;—
Say if adorned as theirs, thy mind the same,
And how to such adornment was inclined ? "
Thus with his questionings probed me then this second flame.

And one, well pleased, who in a lofty flight
Guided my wing, their answerings would prevent :—
" No son of the Church Militant, by light
Of our sunbeams, has more of hope within him blent

" Of all our troop ;—here for a while to bide,
As Egypt once would toward Jerusalem wend ;
And seeing, is a militant prescribed ;—
Two points in thy demand has yet to apprehend ;

"Known by report; a virtue that so much
Has pleased thee, that I leave with him, that he
Be not too strong, or in vain-glorying such,
But in response, as grace of God is given him, be

"A Scholar, with the gift of second sight,
Ready and liberal, where he now is skilled,
Because his goodness can discern the right;
That hope as an attendant I am sure will be fulfilled

"In future glory; so produced will be
By grace Divine, that he in life excell:—
Many within this light of Stars I see;
This in its scintillation first within my heart to dwell.

"Who midst the chiefest singers won chief fame,—
Wouldst thou spurn from thee in thy Teo-dia
As an adornment one who knows thy name,
And will know more of it, when he has learned the fede mia?

"Thou, whose elixir of the pencil's dip
In thy Epistle wrote so much of me,
And others whose replies it would befit,
Mark me: behind the living heart of this will be

"A flickering lamp, incendiary, that will fire
Frequent, and hide as in the lightnings play."
That Spirit then: "As mine, love will inspire
All those by virtue led, who follow in my way,

"And Bearers of the Palm, then leave the camp—
Wouldst thou that I breathe on thee their delight;
Partakers of that grace, hast thou their stamp,
The promise and the hope which these have held in sight?"

And I: "The Scriptures in the Old and in the New
Attest the sign, and show to me the way,
In mind of God, who for my friend I view;
As saith Isaiah: Those who have borne array

"Of vestment, as on Earth, above appear,
And the delight of life on Earth have found:
So if thy Brother clothed upon whilst here,
Seems in more whiteness clad, the inference will abound."

And as I pressed towards my ended word,
Sperent in te, sounded above in song,
As a response to this all Heaven I heard:
And after that came out a light so clear and strong

As if from Cancero fell a crystal seed,
That Winter had a month of sun debarred;—
And as it sprang and came with dancing speed
The new novitiate in its virgin joy to honour and regard:

Not as a fault, together, in the light
Came this towards me, then two, to whirl and spin,
In the intensity of Love's delight:
As such into the Canto put, nor noted more herein.

And the same aspect did my Lady wear,
Held in the silence, an immortal spouse;
And I, as on our Pelican to bear,
Clung to its breast, the cross, to that high office chose.

Then did my Lady with no more of fear
Set close her face to mine, attentively
The first of these my uttered words to hear:—
And I am that: the sun in half eclipse to see

Where mortals' sight the gaze might not beseem;—
So if my argumentive skill has force,
Only as debtor to that latest theme,
Is it because there is no place to see its dazzling force?

On Earth, as earthly, I, the same can see
As many others that our numbering here
With the intent Eternal must agree;
As two habiliments are worn, so in the light appear.

And this I carry to the world below,
This is the voice that with its ardour blends
A quiet rest in sweetest mixtures flow,
As with three Spirits joined the voice of song it sends;

And where fatigue is past, and risk, and fear,
That in their flood at first would overthrow;
All that, but as a whistling sound I hear:
Alas! how much of it had once disturbed me though,

As to Beatrice in my haste I fled,—
Although not seeing her as then, I yet
Have found her close to me on Earth instead,
And happiness whilst living even in the world have met!

PARADISO

CANTO XXVI

THE ARGUMENT

Dante here expresses a doubt if he can retain all these impressions; Saint John, then continuing his discourse, bids him remain on Earth for a while, and immediately proclaims his high commission.

Afterwards Beatrice invokes the spirit of Adam to appear and converse with him.

Dante

PARADISO

Canto XXVI

AND whilst I doubted lest this brilliant view
Might be extinguished in me, now perceived,
Came forth that spirit, my attention drew,
As thus he spake :—"Thou that hast all of this received

"To find the vista wasted in thy thought,
From out my presence soon to be consumed;—
'Twere well that Reason to thy aid be brought,
Begun precisely where thy soul had been illumed,

"So that the vista should not wasted be,
Or Reason in thee seem to be as dead,
Because the Lady who had guided thee
Has by the virtue of the hand of Ananias led."

Said I :—"It was her pleasure, swift though late,
To remedy the eyes that entrance saw,
And of the fire she brought could warmth partake;
The good that to this court does all contentment draw

"Is Alpha and Omega, where is writ
My law of lovingkindness strength to feel,
Whilst the same voice which, changed from fear, had lit
With sudden glow; and left to reason's late appeal."

"For certainly a more imperious will
Than thine enlightens and inflames thee here,
What then should hence direct thy bow of skill?"
And I :—"All arguments, philosophic and clear,

"And an authority that these transcend;
When so much love was to my nature sent
With goodness, as I then could apprehend
That of all good, had love the greatest goodness meant.

"If in such essence an advantage is,
Where both are good, how out of her is found
Another ray less luminous than this,
More as to other things belonging all around

"In lovers thought;—why should it sever so
A truth that in its depth is most approved?"—
"That truth within my intellect would grow
To that it demonstrates and is the best beloved.

"When of all sustenance eternal known;—
For spake the voice of One, that author true
As unto Moses :—'All my goodness shown,
I will make pass before thee': this the valued view."

"Stay thou awhile on Earth"—then as began
That presence with his cry filled all the height,
Through that large place his proclamation ran:
And this I heard :—"By human intellectual light,

"As by authority, do thou record,
And of thy loves, make God's the sovereign guard.
Though after thou mayst feel another cord
Drawing thee from him, of these sounds debarred,

"That as with sharpened teeth thy love would kill.
Not is unknown the inventions eagles hold
Holy, as if of Christ, without my will;
And men of my profession led by them are told."

Then soon he recommenced :—" All those they feed
To strengthen hearts, as to their God they fly,
With all my charity are well agreed,
Remaining in the world, are in it such as I,

" Who death sustained, are living as I live ;
Because their hope is faithful as was mine,
And in foreknowledge of their death still thrive,
Drawn to the shores of Love, directed by that sign.

" The leaf from which embowering leaves shall spring
In the eternal gardener's care, am I,
As unto them, from him the good I bring."
Then was I silent ; and the sweetest notes on high

Resounded through the Heaven. My Lady then,
With all the others joining in the lay,
The holy, holy, holy's deep Amen :
And as my eyelids fell before the unaccustomed ray,

Which, opening, shut again to that they shun,
The while necessity kept constant guard :
So that esteem in failure part begun,
And lower, towards Beatrice turned with thousands more reward,

When from those eyes I saw refulgence pour,—
Whilst I, who seemed as in a stupor held,
Begged her to give me but one part in four,
That I might as the others see, who this beheld.

Then said my Lady :—" Out of such a ray
The Maker of the soul the first man sent,
That primal virtue might increase and stay;
And as the branch that on its leafy top was bent

" In transit of the wind, will rise anew
By its own virtue, if sublimely led,
This seems as too transcendent for thy view ;
And lest in ardour I return to that I said" :—

She recommenced :—"Oh, fruit that made mature
Its offspring bore; the parent of all those,
As wife or daughter, nourished, still endure,
Devout as may be, I entreat thee speech to close;

"Thou hearest all, but hast not spoken yet."—
Then like the animal, in joyful ways
Affection shown, with its companion met,
Allowed to follow there, hidden no longer stays:

The soul of the first man did then appear,
As made apparent from its covering shell,
And came towards me with a rejoicing air,
As thus the spirit spake :—"I can discern full well

"Without thy asking, something thou wouldst know
More certainly; as truthful glass I see
Reflecting knowledge of the things below;—
And nothing of a false appearance there in thee.

"How God had placed me in a garden high,
To which in thy desire thou wouldst ascend,
Which was indeed delightful to mine eye;—
Would know the deep disgrace a fall from this could send.

"An Idiom that was used and came by me:
Oh, son of mine, not tasting of the fruit
Was in itself a cause of the decree,
But solely that I trespassed where it did not suit.

"For that which moved thy Lady's, Virgil's care,
Four thousand years, three hundred and yet two,
I waited that it reconcilement bear:
For near a thousand years the sun was in my view,

"As first I saw him shining on the world:
The language that I spake was then all spent.
The works of Nimrod failing, had unfurled
New languages, which, to Nimrodian people, meant

"That no desire irrationally inclined
Should ever be fulfilled in human will;
Following a course that Heaven alone designed,
Always immutable, and firm continuing still.

"As works of Nature differing in their plan,
With this and that adornment left to you.—
When to the infernal shades the first I ran,
One they had named on Earth the Highest Good I knew,

"And hence that great delight revealed in me:—
ELI since called him in accordance sake;—
The faded leaf as mortal's use we see
Within the branch renewed will like appearance take.

"Upon the Mount that stands above the flood,
My life once pure was since dishonest made;
From earlier hours declined and left the good,
As falls the sun from fourth to sixth in evening's shade."

PARADISO

Canto XXVIII

THE ARGUMENT

Dante is doubtful of the success of his mission in the great poem, and has a prophetic insight of its reverses after the two centenaries of its first reception. Afterwards of its variable and then complete success in its seventh centenary and afterwards.

Beatrice instructs and encourages him.

Dante

PARADISO

Canto XXVIII

IT may be that against a life like this—
The miserable mortal's, truth revealed,
Making my thoughts emparadised in bliss,
Shall seem but as a lantern's torch within the glass concealed

To those behind ; well seen by him the same,
Who holds it then within his sight and thought,
And so revolves it that beneath its flame
Is seen the truth he speaks in strict accordance wrought

With note and metre as may still arise
In memory of facts once there beheld,
Whilst looking into those, the beauteous eyes,
By love first drawn, and with its cord there firmly held ;

And as I thus revolve it, reach towards things
Given me thence, and in this volume seen,
So much as a returning gaze it brings,
Sent keenly back of that my soul enflamed had been.

And for convenience chosen point in view,—
This star seen near the moon scarce less I say,
As star with star harmonious influence drew,—
Perhaps as much when near the edge mist clears away.

Distant and round this point circles a fire,
Whirling so swiftly that its movement stills
When nearest cinctured, as the world's desire ;—
And this was as another a circumference fills,

That of the third, and then fourth less than third,
Fifth less than fourth, and sixth than fifth less part.
Over the seventh such abundance stirred
That Juno's messenger full pleased might know the work of art.

So of the eighth and ninth; and each of those
More slowly moved when from the first away;
And those that most sincere the flame disclose
Are those the least in distance from the star's pure ray,

Believed in most because regarded more.—
My Lady then seeing I had a care,
Greatly perplexed:—"From such a point of store,
Depends the Universe and all of Heaven is there.

"Aim of the circle, nearer it is drawn
And known, the swifter will its movement be,
Through languishment of love when toward it borne."
And I to her:—"If the world out of course I see,

"And seeing that it thus revolving tends,
Experience I should have in that I note;
For in the world they find the flight ascends,
And more divine to seem when from the centre most remote.

"If a desire of mine should end like this,
In marvellings where angelic hosts reside,
Who only Light and Love know for their bliss,
How should he be in evidence who does not coincide,

"Vainly, but for himself all this has seen?"—
"If these my words have not thy knuckle's ring,
Marvellously insufficient this had been
For a foundation;—what is worth thy hold of such a thing."

Thus spake my Lady:—"Then take that away
Which I have spoken, if self-satisfied,
Whilst round thee dwindles all for lack of stay;
Humanity is larger built, grows from within more wide

"As virtue more or less extends its parts;
The larger bounty gives it greater health,
And greater health to crown of head imparts,
If in complete apportionment each takes its wealth.

"When this man, who so much admires the whole
Of the wide Universe, agreement knows,
The more he loves it, more he can unroll;
Virtue his stature fills, that in delight then grows.

"As marvel above marvel circles there,
Within the heaven of his intelligence;
Whilst splendid and serene the empyrean air,
When Boreas with sufficing blow has cleared it thence;

"Purging it so as to dispel the smirch,
That first had darkened, where now laughs the Heaven,
Restored to brightness of its own research."
Thus had my Lady clearly her responses given,

Like to a Star of Heaven that shone the more.
And these her words came with restoring power
Where nothing seemed unkind, but semblance bore
To lightning's swiftest flash amid the darkened hour;

Whilst yet more frequent broke the enkindled flame,
As these in latest scintillations sent
Most frequently, behind their brilliance came
So much the more, what seemed as last dismissal meant.

I felt the hosannas of the Chorus cease,
When backward to Earth's outer court assigned;
Always to stay, where I had found release.
And she, who knew my inmost thought and doubtful mind:—

"Circling the centre of attractive force,
Cherub and Seraphim, as shown thee, fly,
With more celerity as from their source
They draw increase of power in their sublimity.

"Those other souls of Love around it met,
With aspects so divine, are thrones of might;
The first treology for them has set;
And thou must know that these have found their great delight

"When to their deepening view the truth profound
Has been revealed, enlarged in meaning still;
Whilst they can only love that latest found,
And see the measure of reward Grace gives good will,

"As step by step towards highest trinity
They germinate, and grow to greater height,
In this the Springtime of Eternity;
And when no hoof of Aries spoils, or frosts at night,

"Perpetual hosanna there returns,
Within three melodies, that sound like three
In ordinance, as now heart joy discerns;—
Within the hierarchal state there are three in degree:

"First Leadership, and then the Courage force,
And Governmental power the third to be;—
'Tis possible within their circling course
Archangels shall with Principalities agree,

"And ultimately may with Angels sport.
This Ordinance above all else remains:
Whilst down below are God's offenders brought,
All tyranny is there, and all that tyranny retains.

"A Dionysius once had pondered much
Within this ordinance to place his name:
Distinct from mine it would have been as such;
But Gregory after him, as in dissension came.

"How swift to eyes, when opened wide in Heaven,
Does the similitude of things appear;
And as a secret to Earth's mortal's given,
Seek not to be admired if in the quest of Glory *here*."

PARADISO

CANTO XXIX

THE ARGUMENT

Beatrice bids him rebuke the Preachers of that day, and their sale of Indulgences paid for with base coin of the time of Pope Boniface VIII. She afterwards alludes prophetically to a far distant day of glorious and concentrated light.

Dante

PARADISO

CANTO XXIX

SOON as Latona's daughter-twins had shone,
Covered with Aries' and with Libra's light,
That made the horizon seem but as one zone,
Engirt with all the splendour of the Zenith's height.—

As each with each combined its circling glow,
The hemisphere in equilibrium failed;—
And with a smile of joy all this to know,
Beatrice silent, whilst on me the power prevailed.

Then spake she thus: "I wait not thy demand
For that which thou wouldst know of me desired,
As I can see all this and understand,
Not for myself alone such good has been acquired.

"Nor would it be fulfilled unless I speak;—
And in this powerful splendour thus sustained,
In the eternity of time, thus led to seek
Another's apprehension, there to be retained,

"As it may please Eternal Love to show;
Make manifest thereby a newer love;
Not that the first should ever torpid grow,
Or any discord against this be put above.

"Form and material joined, and pure beside,
Came from a height that never knew a fall,
A tricord arch, in three still to abide:
And as the rays resplendent shine through all

"The amber and the crystal these enfold
When nothing from outside can intervene,
One sire effecting this, the cord threefold,
Without distinction from its primal source thus seen;

"Nor bound to power as else, deriving each
Their high creation, not from less derived.
Jerome has written largely, and would teach
That angels in the world were first, as so implied.

"But this the truth, is written much more plain
Within the Holy Spirit's record blent,—
Which thou wilt see when looking at again;
That not conceded if perfection had not full content.

"And know thou shouldst when so beloved were those
The first created, how much then was given
Of thy desire that three it might enclose,
With highest angels now desiring food of Heaven,

"That still remains with thee;—this work begins
Which thou desirest with so much delight,
That nothing from its circling influence wins:—
Superb in malediction first to fall on those thy sight

"Can chiefly see constrain the world to sin;
Though knowing this, in modesty consent
A recognition of the good within,
Which at the first had formed so much of good intent,

"Because the sight had been exalted so;
With grace illumined these in their regard;—
If such fulfilled has stayed their wish to know,
No doubt but they received such grace for their reward

"Accorded as affection there inclined :
Always distinguish this consistently
When so much of my words thou canst refind
Without assistance from outside authority.

"But as on Earth those of the schools instill
The angelic nature is recorded so
In its intention, and as such in will,—
Then speak, because thou seest the truth, and clearly know

"This is equivocation, falsely said ;
Whilst joyful sustenance is in God's face,
Not turned away, from whom is nothing hid ;
Where these will not in any new obedience trace

"Their interest, and wherein they would not seem
To be reminded of devised deceit ;—
Thus lying down, but not for sleep, to dream,
Believed, yet not believing truth in their conceit ;

"But none more culpable or shameful shows,
You need not lower go for a bye-way
Philosophic,—so much will they transpose
Love of a thing apparent, for what they think or say :

"Then, above all, they treat with great disdain
Those that the Sacred Scriptures put aside,
Which they themselves distort and make so vain,
Nor heed how much of costly blood sown in the world beside

"Their pleasure, and which gives them small reproach ;
But those can see, the men who have their wits,
How much their pure invention can encroach ;
And which the Minister and not the Evangelist befits.

"One says the moon has turned her face away,
Christ suffering, and was henceforth interposed
Because the sun's light does not lower stray ;
And others that the light withdrawn was since so closed

"Because the Spaniard and the Indian in the dark,
As with the Jews in like eclipse remained;
Not Florence could more Lapi Bindis mark
Than those that from the pulpit cry their fables strained.

"The whilst the sheep, not being over wise,
Turn from their pasture, fed thereon with wind;—
And well excused when that so much implies.
Christ said not to his first conventicle assigned

"Go teach the world, and idle fables state;
But give them truth for a foundation sure;
Which always sounds so much within their prate,
And thrusts back those that mount towards a faith so pure

"It gave Evangelists their shield and lance.
Now whilst they come with motive and intent
As if to preach the Gospel, 'tis askance
To laugh within their cowl, which gives them most content.

"But nestling there, so much of offal reeks,
The vulgar, looking in, are not afraid
Pardon will be withheld from him who seeks;
And where so deep in confidence his speech was made.

"That in the world much folly should abound,
It needs not further witness to assign:
Saint Antony his pigs such fattening found;
And many others, that are even worse than swine,

"Pay for it in their money's coinless pay.—
Now having thus digressed so long, return
Thy eyes towards that other straiter way,
If not too late in the extent of time, discern

"Where Nature has increased in numbers aged,
Not to be spoken of or known to man
In revelation, or its distance gauged,
For many much too far apart the way to scan;

"But thou, if thou shalt mind what was revealed
Through Daniel, thou wilt see thousands of years,
Determined that which was to be concealed:—
That Light, the first whose rays in different modes appears,

"Received, is full of splendour when these match,
Because the height that is attained unto
Is as a love that all the affections catch,
In differential fervour tenderest warmth renew.

"See now the exceeding height and largeness grown
Of the Eternal will; perhaps thus much
Observed in facts has now to thee been shown
For a memorial, of that which is to come a touch."

PARADISO

CANTO XXX

THE ARGUMENT

Dante with Beatrice arrives at the confines of the Central Sun, where he is permitted to see the Triumph of Christ's Church.

Dante

PARADISO

Canto XXX

SIX thousand miles in distance as it were
The fervid noon was past, and to the world
Returned its shadow, where in deepened air
The farthest stars were hid, and the mid-heaven unfurled.

Herein appeared a clear Aurorian light,
Where the Sun had declined, and heaven enclosed
An infinite of vistas yet more bright,
Nor altered otherwise, and round one point disposed,

As in triumphal dance, and drawn thereto
By the sole influence of attractive force;—
The power engirting them engirding so
As by degrees extinguished from my sight their source.

And turned towards Beatrice could not see
The former love that had constrained me there;
So much had infinite revealed in me
As should include her, too, and in one praise to share;

Though little I might know her finished worth;
The beauty that I saw did so excell,
It was not made for those who dwell on Earth:
Yet could I well believe her Maker there to dwell.

As in its highest flight thus soars my theme,
And more than ever points towards its end,
Thus much concede, that therein it would seem
That Tragedy and Comedy it might perhaps transcend.

As the Sun thus beheld increased in awe,
The memory of her smile was hidden so
From the first day her living face I saw,
And more remote became the songs I sang below.

But this I knew, that if I followed less
And left behind her beauty, more should feel
Of the true Art that poetry can bless,
And in the Poet does his latent power reveal.

Leaving behind for the tumultuous throng
To celebrate that which decreased within,
Had cooled the ardour of material song;—
My Guide with hastening sign and speed would thus begin:

"Now have we reached unto the fount of Heaven,
Filled with all light and intellectual love,
Love that in true delight is freely given:
Delight that every earthly woe can soar above.

"Where may be seen the troops now here, now there,
All of one aspect; as in Paradise
At the last judgment thou shalt see them wear."
Then, as in flash withdrawn, were hidden from my eyes

Those Spirits that so visible appeared;—
In failing vision now were lost to sight,
Enwrapt, as all their dazzling influence neared,
Within a veil, darkened as with excess of light.

The love that once has thus been felt from Heaven
Will gather to itself a healthier mind,
As to a taper greater light is given;
And not less swift above myself its influence was defined.

For from this newer vista I received
Such light and in such measure as my eyes
Could not support, although in mind believed:
Wherein I saw a river full of light to rise,

Between two shores it ran, enamelled o'er
With flowers that wore a marvellous touch of spring,
And from it issued vital sparks of power,
On this side and on that, which to the flowers could bring

Of Ruby and of Gold the garniture;
When as inebriate of their own perfume
They plunged into the wave, they were no fewer,
For as one dived beneath, another was illumed.

"The strong desire that will not be restrained
For knowledge of the things which now we see,
Gives me most pleasure as the more constrained,"—
The sunlight of my eyes regardful answered me.

"And of this water know that those who drink
An equal thirst for it must first attain."
And thus she spake:—"The river at whose brink
The topaz lies, and enters in only to rise again;

"The smiling verdure whereon these can rest,
Is but a shadow of more perfect bliss;
Not that its measure should disturb thy zest,
But thy defect in vision may not reach to this."

Then as an infant on its mother's breast
Draws its first nourishment, and turns again
Towards a fountain that has seemed so blest,—
As through a mirror then I sought my eyes to strain

Towards those who had descended in the wave,
And hidden from my sight were there submerged,—
Would dip my eyelids' fringe wherein they lave,
And whence, as from an endless circle, they emerge.

The whilst within it as they thus remain
Unaltered seemingly their former look,
And recognised as still to be the same
When in a higher festival they then partook.

And mingling thus the flowers and sparks of light
Made manifest to me the Courts of Heaven.—
Oh, splendour of my God! that in such sight
The triumph of a virtuous Kingdom there is given.

And thus illumed made visible to those
Who seeing Him alone have found their peace.
Creator! thus his creature to enfold,
A sun's circumference, seen in largeness to increase,

And still the rays surrounding it the same
As at the first, but these reflecting more
The power and life they hold within its flame;—
And as descends a mountain top seen in a watery floor

That mirrors its adornments, giving back
The all of verdure and of flowers it grew,
When these depart, and parting leave no track,
Then all surrounding light gives back unto our view

More than a thousand thrones, wherein can blend
So much of us as fitted seems for Heaven.—
If toward infinitude our footsteps tend,
Think ye to this large Rose too many leaves are given?

This vista mine, neither in breadth or height
Shall e'er be lost, but unto all will show
Some mete proportion of a great delight
Not near, or too far off, not seen too high or low,

Where God shall govern without medium's aid;
And laws of Nature will suspend their power.
The Rose eternal was not made to fade,
But still dilates and rounds in odours of the flower

Exhaled in sunshine of Eternal spring.
Turned to Beatrice :—"Tell me who are those
Silent, who yet would speak, and seem to bring
Such marvellous whiteness to conventional stoles?

"Seen in our City, how at large they rove;
Appearing to our sight as so replete
That scarcely others to desire would move."—
"Yonder now turn thy eyes to fix on that great seat,

"And where a Crown above is set so near;
The first one at the Marriage Supper thou
To see where sits a soul of coinage dear,
True impress; fallen Italy that raised, high Arrago.

"A blind cupidity to sickness bound
Has made *her* like an infant that resists
Its nurse, and famished dies:—thus to be found
A Prefect of the Court Divine hidden or named insists.

"But not in suff'rance long will God allow
In holy office, but will downward thrust,
To where the Sorcerer Simon's merits show,
The fall of him of Allagna to be more just."

PARADISO

CANTO XXXI

THE ARGUMENT

Wherein Dante expresses his wonder and delight at all he has been permitted to see. Beatrice suddenly takes her departure, leaving Saint Bernard to discourse with him.

Dante

PARADISO

CANTO XXXI

AS a white Rose, Saints militant I saw,
That Christ in his own blood did once espouse ;
Whilst others, like to Bees round honeyed store,
Told of their one Beloved the fame, from sweet's carouse :

These all like living fire, gold-winged, or white
As snow, that from the earth no taint receives :
Whilst round the flower they linger in their flight,
Clustering in swarms to rest in largeness of the leaves.

With great contentment sounding forth his praise,
As far they fly, to bank the gathered store ;
Nor darken in their burdened flight the rays
That fill the Universe with light :—the less or more,

Nor power prevents :—and where, above these dwell
In realm secure and vast, as marked they view
The kindly faces that beseemed them well,
Frequenters of an olden world,—now of the new.

Oh, Triune light, shining on this one star,
That in its scintillation gives content ;—
Guard us below where all our dangers are,
In the bright radiance from thy effluence sent !

If those Barbarian hordes, that robbers came
From Northern climes, beneath the cold starr'd sphere,
That gave to Elise every day new shame,
Bearing away her sons to dwell the robbers near;

Coming to Rome from far, the marvel saw
Of all her works, and stood in mute surprise
At such magnificence; whilst in their awe
The Latin race surpassed all others in their eyes:

Well then might I, to the divine in man
Passed, as from time into Eternity;
And out of Florence, excellence to scan,
And just men, marvel even more at that I see.

Truly to those who make of it but game,
I have no liberty in this record:
Others again I hope to see the same,
A pilgrim to the temple of his vow restored.

If by the living light that I pass through,
I may direct their eyes to mount on high,
As step by step they strive to gain my view,
And following it, return, and yet again will try;

They shall see faces of persuasive love,
In ornament of light, high honours crest;
The form they wear in Paradise above;
The all of whose regards I have but part exprest.

And wishing in renewed desire to learn
Of that, the doubting, had perplexed me sore,
Towards my Lady once again I turn,
To see Beatrice still—when someone else I saw:

Not that intelligence I wished to find,
But an old man robed like the glory there,
His eyes diffusive and his manner kind,
Such as in saintly joy a father might appear.

"And where is she?" then instantly I spake;
And he replying: "Thy desire to end,
Beatrice moved me to my place forsake;
In the third circle see enthroned thy friend,

"Where merit placed her."—And my eyes I raise
To see her wearing a celestial crown,
Reflecting in herself the Eternal rays
Of that pure region, where she meets with more renown

Than mortal eyes discover in the deep
Of other seas; and hidden from my gaze;—
Though not descending with me, memory's sleep,
Nor distance has removed her, in the midst of haze.

"Oh, Lady, thou in whom my hopes were set,
Who, saving me, thyself has suffered so,
As even within Hell thy track was met;—
To whose benignant strength virtue and grace I owe:

"All I have seen, and as I have by thee
Been freed and rescued by thy power and care;—
In thy magnificence my guardian be;
So shall my disembodied soul well please thee there."

Thus did I pray: and from the far off came,
As then appeared the smile of her regard,
Returning to the fount from whence it came;—
And thus the holy man: "To gain this, thy reward,

"Perfect thy steps towards that garden fair,
Where love and prayer have met thee sending me,
So that thou mayst ascend in holy care,
Mounting up higher, and by Light Divine to see.

"Shall not the Queen of Heaven, whom I regard
With so much ardour, not accord me grace?
As I am faithful to her—her Bernard;
The same as came from Croazia's far-off place,

"To see an ancient picture, of whose fame
I was not satisfied alone to hear;
And said within my thought, when shown the same,
'Did this my Christ, true God, or your resemblance wear?'

"Much had I marvelled at the living love
That in this world of ours such peace could show."
And "Child of Grace," he said, "think not to move
In joy like this, thy eyes set on the things below.

"Search now, and in a circle more remote,
See as thou canst so much the seated Queen,
Who in this Kingdom subject is devote."
And as I raised my eyes, a light like morning's beam

In the far East, along the horizon spread,
Sovereign, where lately had declined the sun,
That in the vale its light no longer shed
Yet seemed, and on another side, in mighter force to run:

Just as some waiting, watched in fear, the car
Of a bad charioteer, as on he came,
And there, and thence, saw, as it rose afar,
The lessening of that light from the great oriflame;

When midst of heaven the torch pacific burned,
And with an equal force subdued its fire;
More than a thousand angels, winged, had turned
In festal joy their splendid feathery wings attire:

Seeming in all their gladness and their song,
Each to enjoy more soul contented mirth
Than to the eyes of mortal saints belong:
And tell this as I ought, or left to fancy's worth,

In neither way would lessen their delight:
Whilst Bernard, following where my eyes would rest
From colder glance, fixed his attentive sight;
And, seeing this, renewed in me my ardent zest.

Dante's Last Vision

PARADISO

CANTO XXXIII

WAITING to fix my meaning in the rhyme,
One moment in a lethargy doth creep
Like five and twenty ages, counting time,
Old Neptune watched for Argos' shade darkening the deep.

In rapt attention, all my powers of mind
Concentred in the gaze that fixed my eyes
On a transcendent light; I saw combined
Within one marvel, yet another marvel rise.

But memory holds it not; nor can endure
What would efface or mar all other joy;
Intolerance of a lesser good procure,
And mix the present earth's delights with an alloy.

For in the abyss of radiance I beheld
Three circles that were blended in one bow;
And in reflection every ray was weld;
The third, like fire, caught from the others' glow.

Yet this to what I saw, than little, less;
Oh, Light Eternal, of all else possessed,
Sole understood; still thou dost seem to bless
Reflection; for I saw our image there impressed.

Like those well versed in geometric lore,
Puzzle the circle with a measuring line;
And anxious all its mystery to explore,
Can find no settled point the starting to define.

So I, with strong desire and looks intent,
Would fit the Image to its circling frame,
Which in agreement, still revolved, but lent
No power to tell its might, or fix a name.

Nor might I speak, struck by that dazzling light,
Which veiled in thought, of utterance debars;—
The Myth, and my Desire, still keep their flight
Silent, and voiceless, like the Love that moves the sun and stars.

THE END.

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